



Missing Foundations

25 Questions on the Problem of Evil

**Including an Introductory Overview of the Most Well-Known
Western Responses and a Commentary on Them**

Authored by: Aḥmad Ḥasan

Translated by: Abdullah Sueidi


HASEEN
CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND STUDIES

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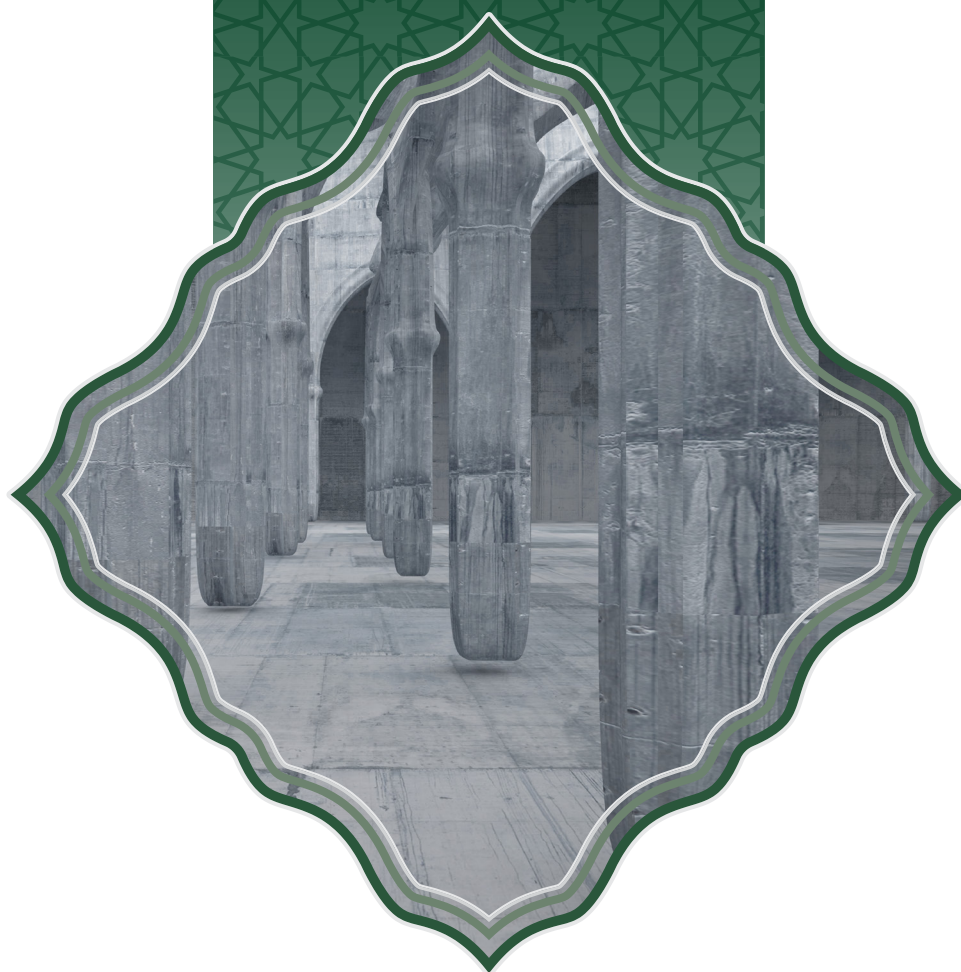
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***In the name of Allah, the Most
Gracious, the Most Merciful.***



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Haseen Center's Foreword

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. May peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muḥammad, his family, and his companions.

In an age marked by competing worldviews and profound questions about existence, meaning, and morality, the Islamic perspective stands out for its harmony between reason and revelation, intellect and faith, evidence and innate disposition.

Haseen Center is dedicated to confronting intellectual and ideological deviations by nurturing faith and producing educational and research-based materials through modern methods—helping build resilient and tranquil communities grounded in sound knowledge and belief.

Guided by this vision, Haseen Center for Research and Studies in Kuwait has launched this translation project to present select contemporary Arabic works on the proofs and virtues of Islam, as well as critique of atheism and secularism, to English-speaking audiences. The aim is to provide both Muslims and non-Muslims with authentic insights into how Islamic scholarship addresses questions of belief, doubt, and the human quest for meaning.

The translated works range from concise essays by renowned scholars, distinguished for their intellectual depth, to academic studies by specialized researchers, appreciated for their analytical rigor. Together, they reflect the breadth and vitality of contemporary Islamic scholarship—where reasoned argument is harmonized with the guidance of revelation.

The translation team has endeavored to ensure accuracy, clarity, and fidelity to the original texts, while preserving their tone and context, and clarifying concepts that may be unfamiliar to non-Arabic readers.

These works invite fair-minded reflection and sincere dialogue in the pursuit of truth. For in Islam, faith in Allah is both rational and innate, a conviction that fills life with peace and purpose.

This project has been made possible—by the grace of Allah—and through the generous support of the Endowment of Eisa Abdula Abdul Aziz ALothman (may Allah have mercy on him), whose contribution embodies a noble commitment to knowledge and to spreading the light of understanding across the world.

May Allah bless this endeavor, make it fruitful, and guide all seekers of truth to what is right and good.



Translator's Introduction

Throughout human history, the existence of pain and suffering, often referred to as “the problem of evil,” has presented one of the most profound challenges to faith and reason. It is a question that transcends cultures and eras, often serving as the true crucible where doubts about divine justice and wisdom are forged. In an age saturated with information that is often distorted or incomplete, the need for a robust, accessible, and faith-affirming response has never been more critical, especially for sincere seekers of truth.

It is precisely this pressing need that Aḥmad Ḥasan addresses with remarkable clarity and depth in *Missing Foundations: 25 Questions on the Problem of Evil, Including an Introductory Overview of the Most Well-Known Western Responses and a Commentary on Them*. This book is a vital contribution to the contemporary Islamic library, designed not only to equip Muslims with intellectual arguments but also to address the deep emotional and psychological underpinnings of doubt.

Ḥasan begins by providing an insightful overview of how Western philosophy and Christian theology have grappled with the problem of evil. He meticulously examines the responses of prominent thinkers such as Alvin Plantinga, C. S. Lewis, and William Lane Craig, highlighting their contributions while also pinpointing their limitations, particularly when detached from the comprehensive guidance of divine revelation. This comparative approach serves to underscore the unique strength and coherence of the Islamic worldview.

The core of *Missing Foundations* lies in its eloquent and direct articulation of the Islamic perspective. Ḥasan masterfully navigates complex theological concepts, affirming Allah’s absolute perfection, justice, and infinite wisdom. He unpacks the profound truth that this worldly life is fundamentally a realm of trial and test, a crucible for the human soul to manifest its true nature and attain higher stations. Drawing extensively from the Qur’ān and Sunnah, the book provides compelling answers to common questions, such as the suffering of innocents, the nature of natural disasters, the purpose of divine decree, the wisdom behind legal punishments (*ḥudūd*), and the spiritual significance of delayed supplications.



Crucially, the author dedicates significant attention to what he identifies as “missing foundations”—the specific gaps in knowledge and understanding that can leave even observant Muslims vulnerable to doubts. These include insufficient religious knowledge, unrealistic idealism about life, misinterpretations of compassion, and succumbing to despair in the face of societal challenges or personal setbacks. By addressing these practical and psychological dimensions, *Missing Foundations* offers not just an intellectual argument but also a spiritual balm and a roadmap for inner fortitude.

As a translator, I have aimed to convey the author’s profound insights and accessible style to an English-speaking audience. In a world where the misrepresentation of Islam is rampant and where the problem of evil is frequently weaponized against faith, this book stands as a beacon of clarity and conviction. It is my sincere hope that this translation will enable readers to deepen their understanding of Allah’s perfect wisdom, strengthen their certainty in His justice and mercy, and find profound peace amidst life’s trials. May Allah make this effort beneficial to all who seek guidance and deeper understanding. Āmīn.

Abdullah Sueidi



Introduction

Throughout human history, countless minds have emerged to steer the course of millions of people—sometimes toward good, and at other times toward evil. However, a wise person seeks to examine each of these paths, holding them up to the principles of sound thinking and balanced judgment. This examination is essential to see how well these ideas align with reason and natural disposition (*fiṭrah*), and whether they are free from internal contradictions.

For this reason, there is a pressing need for a series like this—“Intellectual Discourses”.

In this book, Aḥmad Ḥasan presents 25 common issues related to the problem of evil—questions revolving around the existence of pain and suffering in the world. Sadly, the ignorance of the Islamic responses to these issues has led to the absence of key foundations that can leave some Muslims vulnerable to confusion.

However, before delving into these 25 questions, the author takes us through nearly half the book in an introductory exploration of the problem of evil and the most famous Western responses to it, comparing them to what Islam offers in this regard. This is done by examining the responses of three prominent Western thinkers: Alvin Plantinga, C. S. Lewis, and William Lane Craig.

Dalā'il Center



This Book

Over the course of eight years spent engaged in what could only be called intensive dialogues—literally hundreds of them, without exaggeration—with young people, men, and women who were atheists, skeptics, or irreligious (some of whom were once devout Muslims), I can say with full certainty that the majority of cases of true atheism stem from a single cause—no matter how different it might appear on the surface. That cause is the problem of the existence of evil in the world, or in other words, the issue of pain, suffering, and deprivation.

This is a problem that everyone can understand—unlike the scientific or philosophical challenges to faith—because it affects the lives of ordinary people, including scholars, laypersons, experts, Muslims, and non-Muslims alike, as well as young and old, rich and poor, and men and women. This is why Hans Küng described it as “the rock of atheism.”⁽¹⁾

I can say with complete confidence to anyone engaging with a skeptic or a genuine atheist: their atheism most often boils down to the problem of evil, which is essentially a problem with the concept of divine wisdom and justice, a misunderstanding of Allah’s mercy, and the difference between divine mercy and human sympathy or tenderness. It is a deeply emotional or psychological problem with belief in Allah, or with religion itself, or with the state of believers.

Once the superficial doubts of atheism—such as those arising from physics or Darwinian evolution—fall away, the atheist often reveals the true root of their rejection: a history of abuse in childhood, a miserable adolescence or marriage, the trauma of war and destruction, witnessing the death of a loved one, a visible religious commitment combined with memorization of the Qur’ān but facing a trial they felt had no justification, a disappointment when a prayer seemed unanswered, or disillusionment with the state of the Muslim world or with fellow Muslims. And so it goes...

This is a logical conclusion when assessing true atheism: it is not aligned with reason or science, as many claim, but rather driven by emotion and personal experiences. After all, nothing in

(1) Küng, Hans. 1976. *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn. Garden City, New York: Doubleday p. 432.



science points more clearly than to the existence of God and His signs, and nothing is more fragile than the attempts to obscure those signs with the veil of false science or flawed logic.

I can understand how someone might harbor doubts as a deist (who believes in God but is unsure about religion) or a skeptic of religion or Islam, because such doubts come after an initial belief in God or a Creator. But to claim that there is no God or Creator at all (modern atheism)⁽¹⁾—this, I am certain, is virtually impossible to sustain except as a reaction born of anger or resentment toward God, or toward religion, or even toward religious people themselves. It is, in essence, a kind of response: “Since God hurt me in something I love—or by His will, decree, hearing, and seeing—then I will retaliate by denying His existence!”

That is atheism, from the most immature teenager to Stephen Hawking⁽²⁾—nothing more, nothing less.

What follows is the array of arguments that atheists use, attempting to cloak their motivations in the language of science, logic, or reason, to convince themselves (or others) that their atheism is based on valid reasons, rather than on emotion, anger, or retaliation.

Understanding this also explains why there are atheists even among scientists, philosophers, intellectuals, and intelligent people in their respective fields. The psychological drive can, unfortunately, blind the mind.

Let’s take, for example, the American physicist and well-known atheist Steven Weinberg, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1979 (shared). In one of his essays, titled “A Designer Universe”⁽³⁾, he discussed the signs of design—or creation—in the universe. Surprisingly, there is no real

(1) It is worth mentioning that the original meaning of the word “ilḥād” in Arabic is “to incline away from something” or “to swerve from it.” It shares its root with the word “laḥd,” which refers to the burial chamber in the sidewall of a grave. The Qur’ān uses the word “ilḥād” to describe those who turn away from the signs of Allah, His clear proofs, and the true religion, as well as those who distort the meanings of Allah’s Names. Historically, the term “ilḥād” has been used in Islamic discourse to describe heretics or innovators who deny core tenets of the faith—such as the bodily resurrection on the Day of Judgment—not necessarily referring to the denial of Allah’s existence. However, today, the word has come to be almost exclusively used to mean disbelief in the existence of a God or Creator.

(2) Stephen Hawking: A theoretical physicist and well-known atheist, famous for his struggle with a rare paralytic disease that left him confined to a wheelchair.

(3) The essay is titled *A Designer Universe* and can be found on the popular physics site physlink:

www.physlink.com/education/essay_weinberg.cfm



presence of scientific reasons for atheism, as one might expect from a physicist, in his words⁽¹⁾. On the contrary, we find him speaking about the problem of evil, pain, and suffering—despite his deep grounding in physics! (Contrast this with an Arab youth who claims his atheism stems from physics.)

In fact, Weinberg made a shocking admission during an interview with the evolutionary atheist Richard Dawkins. He said that the fine-tuning of the universe's laws has put atheism in an awkward position, leaving atheists with only two options: either admit the existence of a Creator or resort to the idea of multiple universes⁽²⁾. He said this even though the concept of multiple universes is nothing more than an assumption or guesswork, with no observational or experimental evidence to support it.

Returning to the essay mentioned above, we find that among the reasons Weinberg cited for his atheism is the fact that he had been happier than about 99.99% of humanity until his mother was diagnosed with cancer and passed away, followed by his father's life being shattered by Alzheimer's disease. On top of that, he lost two cousins in the Nazi Holocaust. These experiences, in his view, overshadowed any signs of a Designer (or Creator) in the universe. Of course, this is a confusion of categories—similar to someone saying, “This rifle is a weapon of evil; therefore, it has no maker!”

Desire and personal inclinations can lead a soul to stubbornness and denial, even while fully aware of the consequences or punishment that await. This was the case of Iblīs (Satan), whose own desires blinded him, leading him to disobey while standing in the presence of Allah. His arrogance and ingratitude drove him to persist in rebellion, despite his certainty about the fate that awaited him.

Even in our daily lives, we see addicts or smokers (who might even be doctors) willingly engaging in addiction or smoking despite knowing full well the harm it brings.

I won't prolong this introduction, which, like the entire book, I have worked hard to keep brief and accessible. This is because most of those who explore the problem of evil tend to (whether intentionally or unintentionally) adopt an academic style that leans toward philosophy. This approach benefits only those who already have familiarity with technical terminology, famous

(1) Some atheist physicists claim there is no need to believe in a Creator because they can describe and interact with nature using physical laws without reference to the Creator. This is a logical fallacy. It can easily be exposed by presenting them with a new device (say, a machine they've never seen before). They would describe and operate it using physical laws without knowing the identity of its creator or designer. But... does that negate the fact that this machine has a maker or designer? Would any of them dare claim that the machine assembled itself by chance or randomness?

(2) The interview with Steven Weinberg (subtitled) can be viewed on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9vxBTQ4uGs (from 7:25)



philosophical figures, and the style of deep intellectual debates. It's naturally much harder for the average reader to grasp.

Thus, this book has been written in a direct style, omitting unnecessary explanations, quotes, and commentaries. The focus is on the essential points alone, which I pray Allah helps me to present clearly. I've also set aside weaker points, especially those based on the shortcomings of Christian theology, which Western thinkers have often used to explain the problem of evil. However, for readers who wish to explore the details further, I will point them to some English and even Arabic books that have recently started shedding light on this crucial and dangerous subject—the problem of evil⁽¹⁾.

In the End...

Amidst the grave events that are shaking the Muslim world today, and as evil unveils its ugly face in real life, on screens, and across social media—rattling the soul with scenes of injustice, slaughter, genocide, killing, or torture (especially in our Islamic or Arab lands)—and with the weakness of proper religious education and sound foundations in both family and school settings (which, when present, is often focused on outward religious observance rather than inward understanding)...

You will find that this religious education lacks any true comprehension of the reality of worldly life—that it is a place of trials and tests, not a paradise or garden of eternal bliss.

Against this backdrop, I found it necessary to dedicate an entire section of this book to fortifying and supporting a group that, unfortunately, many of us have overlooked in our writings and guidance: some Muslims who were once committed.

Aḥmad Ḥasan

Head of Research at Dalā'il Center

(1) For example, see the book *Mushkilat al-Sharr wa Wujūd Allāh: al-Radd 'alā Abrazī Shubuhāt al-Mulhidīn* by Dr. Sāmī al-Āmirī, published by Markaz Takwīn for Research and Studies, 1437 AH / 2016 CE.



C. S. Lewis

The first of the three figures whose views we will explore in this book, C. S. Lewis, was a man of emotion, a lover of nature, beauty, and life. As a child, he even gave himself the nickname Jack, after his dog Jacksie, who was killed by a car. This nickname stuck with him throughout his life. His full name was Clive Staples Lewis, shortened to C. S. Lewis.

His family moved from Britain to Ireland, where he was born in 1898 CE, and he passed away in the United Kingdom in 1963 CE at the age of 65.

From his teenage years and youth, he was deeply interested in fantasy stories, animal tales, and legends, which had a significant impact on his later academic pursuits. This interest led him to study Greek and later specialize in English literature, which opened the doors to the rich literary, historical, and mythological heritage of ancient and Scandinavian Europe.

His most notable academic achievements were at the University of Oxford, where he studied after moving to the United Kingdom. One of the major turning points in his life was the death of his mother from cancer when he was just ten years old, an event that led him into atheism at an early age—before he was even fifteen, as he mentioned in his memoirs. His atheism was deepened by his firsthand experiences of the horrors of World War I, with its unprecedented killing and destruction, and the development of deadly modern weaponry.

Despite all this, with the help of some friends, he was able to return to Christianity at around the age of thirty⁽¹⁾. This experience of confronting evil and suffering left a clear mark on his writings, giving them a level of intellectual engagement that stood apart from the superficiality often seen in many Christian religious leaders.

(1) At the forefront of those who helped him was his friend, the renowned English professor and novelist John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, author of the famous fantasy novel *The Lord of the Rings*.



Indeed, he translated these experiences into powerful words, delivering them through religious radio broadcasts during World War II, which played a major role in establishing his fame for the rest of his life.

Between writing, literature, critique, radio, and philosophy (especially discussions on good and evil and religion), C. S. Lewis's literary works—particularly his fantasy stories—drew many fans of tales and legends to him. Readers connected with him as a talented author even before discovering his religious and intellectual writings. This highlights the importance of such literature in creating a bond between writers and broad segments of society, even through fantasy fiction. We'll see an example of this in an article by someone influenced by C. S. Lewis, who first fell in love with him through his stories.

His most famous literary and fantasy works include the *Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of seven novels published between 1949 and 1954, alongside other lesser-known fantasy novels for younger readers, such as the *Space Trilogy* published in 1938.

As for his most well-known intellectual and religious books—where he addressed issues of good, evil, pain, and ethics—they include:

- *The Problem of Pain* (1940),
- *The Abolition of Man* (1943),
- *Miracles* (1947), and
- *Mere Christianity*, a collection of his most significant radio broadcasts during World War II.

While much of C. S. Lewis's writing aimed to present Christian doctrine—especially the Trinity, Adam's sin, the crucifixion, and redemption—in a new rational light (which exposed certain logical weaknesses that have led us to avoid using these particular arguments)⁽¹⁾, his writings on good, evil, and ethics contain benefits that place them among the best intellectual ideas to employ rationally and logically in addressing the problem of evil, or confronting atheism in general.

(1) One of Allah's established patterns in human history is that distortion and falsification never possess inherent strength of argument. Rather, they are riddled with contradictions that any sincere seeker of truth must pause to consider. No one accepts them unless out of necessity or because they consider them the best of what is available—which is the case for many Christian intellectuals in the West, especially those who have not been introduced to Islam. They often see the “absurdities” of Christianity as far preferable to the “absurdities” of atheism.



Alvin Plantinga

The second figure we will explore is Alvin Carl Plantinga, a philosopher of Dutch heritage, born in the U.S. state of Michigan in 1932 CE. He is one of the most prominent Christian philosophers alive today, and a leading figure in analytic philosophy⁽¹⁾.

He specialized in the fields of philosophy of religion, epistemology, metaphysics, and Christian apologetic theology.

His method, which earned him great fame and distinction in his field, is characterized by structured analysis—guiding the reader or researcher through a sequence of points until reaching a conclusion to be proven or disproven. Among his most famous contributions was his refutation of materialism in science and life (materialism being the rejection of everything non-material, intangible, or unobservable—such as God, angels, etc.) using a clever approach based on the internal admissions and implications of materialism itself, especially in relation to evolution⁽²⁾.

It is worth noting that Alvin Plantinga's family was profoundly inclined towards philosophy and theology. His father held a PhD in philosophy and a master's degree in psychology; his brother, Neal, was a professor of theology; and his daughters, Jane and Ann, were involved in church work.

Throughout his educational and teaching journey, Alvin Plantinga passed through prestigious colleges and universities, including Jamestown College, Calvin College, Harvard University, University of Michigan, Yale University, and University of Notre Dame. One of the many honors

(1) Analytic philosophy is a school of philosophy that focuses on language and its analysis to eliminate confusion, ambiguity, distortion, or fallacy in meaning. It is the most widespread school of philosophy among English-speaking philosophers since its establishment by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872–1970 CE) and others influenced by German and Austrian philosophers of logical analysis, such as Gottlob Frege (1848–1925 CE).

(2) This has been addressed in our book published by Dalā'il Center in 1437 AH / 2016 CE, titled *al-Ilhād bayna Quṣūrayn*, in the second part of the book *Interview with Alvin Plantinga and Its Three Appendices*.



he received was in 2006, when the University of Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion renamed the “Distinguished Research Fellowship” to the Alvin Plantinga Fellowship.

Another notable award he received was in 2012, when the Department of Philosophy, the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, and the Center for Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh jointly awarded him the Nicholas Rescher Prize for systematic philosophy. In his acceptance talk, he addressed the theme: “Religion and Science: Where Is the Real Conflict?”

When we consider his most significant contributions to his field and the famous views associated with him in contemporary Western thought, we find them centered on the question of proving the existence of God as part of basic human belief—through justified intuition, common sense, and teleological arguments (teleology referring to the appearance of purpose or design in things made or created for a particular purpose).

His work in refuting the logical problem of evil and responding to it is a cornerstone of his legacy. For the first time, it was demonstrated—analytically and logically—that the supposed link between the existence of evil in the world and the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and good God collapses under scrutiny. Alvin Plantinga was able to prove philosophically that there could be a logical reason for such a God to permit evil, the reason being the granting of free will to human beings. This led to his development of what is now known as the Free Will Defense.

He also offered responses to both categories of evil: moral evil, caused by human free will, and natural evil, caused by natural disasters and events of fate. While his treatment of moral evil was thorough and convincing, his discussion of natural evil was comparatively weak, as we will see.

Among his many important and notable works, the following stand out:

- *God and Other Minds* (1967), which earned him great distinction,
- *The Nature of Necessity* (1974),
- And in the same year, he presented his Free Will Defense and refutation of the logical problem of evil in *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974). He also authored a trilogy of books on epistemology⁽¹⁾.

(1) Two of the most important branches of philosophy are epistemology and ontology. Epistemology, in short, focuses on methods of thinking and understanding—whether these methods are correct or flawed—relating to the observer and the object observed. Ontology, on the other hand, focuses on the study of existence itself, whether material or immaterial, such as values, principles, and ideals.



William Lane Craig

The third and final figure whose views we will explore in this book.

William Lane Craig was born in 1949 CE in the state of Illinois, United States. Today, he is a well-known figure in the West in the fields of analytic philosophy (like Alvin Plantinga) and theology. He is recognized in Europe and America for his debates with some of the leading figures of the New Atheism movement, such as Sam Harris⁽¹⁾, Christopher Hitchens, and Lawrence Krauss.

William Lane Craig has excelled in structuring arguments about the origin of morality, which he identifies as one of the greatest weaknesses of atheism. He is also famous for reviving a traditional Islamic method of argument based on the concept of *ḥudūth* (the coming into being of the universe) as evidence for the existence of the Creator or God. He called this argument the *Kalām* Cosmological Argument, preserving the name's connection to its original source: the Muslim philosophers and scholars of *ʿIlm al-Kalām* (Islamic theological discourse),⁽²⁾ such as al-Kindī and al-Ghazālī (may Allah have mercy on them).

(1) This topic was covered in the first part of our book published by Dalā'il Center: *al-Ilhād bayna Qaşūrayn* (Atheism Between Two Shortcomings), 1437 AH / 2016 CE, where a debate was held between them on the origin of morality.

(2) *ʿIlm al-Kalām* is a discipline that some Muslim scholars (especially the philosophers, Mu'tazilites, and Ash'arīs) developed to engage with or respond to ancient Greek pagan philosophies and others. Unfortunately, this engagement and imitation gradually led them to an excessive reliance on reason to access and understand truths—so much so that some of them delved into the essence of Allah Himself (which is pure unseen knowledge, known only through revelation). They failed to realize that the excessive use of reason among pagan philosophers was due to their disconnection from revelation, whereas the Muslim has no excuse to override clear revelation with rational speculation. This led to certain weaknesses and errors in their methods (as admitted by major figures of *ʿIlm al-Kalām* themselves, especially towards the ends of their lives, such as al-Ash'arī, al-Ghazālī, and al-Rāzī—may Allah have mercy on them), where they acknowledged the indispensability of understanding the texts of the Prophet ﷺ, his Companions, and the early generations of the Ummah, which suit both the simple and the learned alike.



The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument presented by William Craig can be described as the Argument from *Hudūth* (origination), built upon two premises and a conclusion:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause or creator⁽¹⁾.
2. The universe has been proven to have begun (especially following the Big Bang theory)⁽²⁾.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause or creator (which believers identify as God).

Because of its simplicity—summarized in just three logical steps—this argument became central to one of his most famous books from the early stages of his academic life: *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, published in 1979 CE when he was thirty years old. This work brought him widespread recognition. The first part of the book is dedicated to the history of the argument, tracing its roots back to the medieval period and the scholars of *Ilm al-Kalām*, and the second part presents his modern version, supported by numerous scientific, physical, and astronomical proofs for the universe's beginning.

Academically, William Craig studied and taught at several prestigious universities, including the University of Birmingham and Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. In his writings, he pays significant attention to drawing upon Christian theology (such as the Trinity, crucifixion, and atonement) to address the emotional objection surrounding the problem of pain and evil in the world, similar to C. S. Lewis.

He was also influenced by Alvin Plantinga's arguments regarding the logical problem of evil and the Free Will Defense, which he often reiterated in public forums and lectures.

William Craig also excelled in refuting the idea of actual infinities in physics and mathematics, an idea to which atheist physicists often resort, attempting to disguise it with flawed calculations and present it as something valid and meaningful in physics or mathematics.

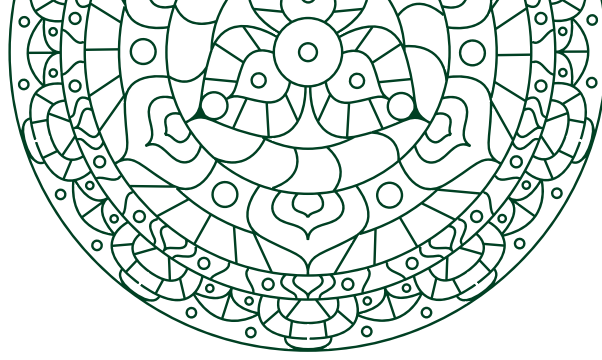
(1) This is alluded to in the Qur'ān: **“Were they created out of nothing? Or are they themselves the creators?”** (*al-Ṭūr*: 35).

(2) The Big Bang theory began as a hypothesis proposed by the Belgian priest and astronomer Georges Lemaître in 1927 CE, suggesting the expansion of the universe. Over time, the idea gained support from astronomical and physical evidence, such as the observed redshift of distant galaxies. The debate continued between the Steady State theory and the Big Bang theory until it was decisively settled in 1964 CE with the discovery of the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation, confirming the universe's continuous expansion. This implies that the universe had an initial state of immense density and pressure where space, time, and the four known physical forces (electromagnetism, gravity, strong nuclear force, and weak nuclear force) were indistinguishable. This point is what became known as the Big Bang. The term was coined by one of its critics, British astronomer and mathematician Fred Hoyle, in 1949 CE during a BBC radio broadcast where he explained to listeners the difference between the Big Bang theory and the Steady State theory.



Finally, William Craig has authored numerous intellectual, philosophical, and theological works, including:

- *Creation out of Nothing*,
- *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*,
- *Reasonable Faith*, and
- *Time and Eternity*.



Chapter One: Introduction to the Problem of Evil



(1) The Root of the Problem is Non-Religious

No rational person (whether a thinker or an impartial philosopher) denies the limitations of human intellect and capacity in understanding the realities of things and the happenings in both the seen and unseen worlds. This is precisely why there has always been a natural human need for heavenly (or divine) guidance—something that sound, pure hearts eagerly embrace and affirm, especially when it comes in the form of reliable revelation supported by clear proofs of its divine origin (i.e., from the Creator or God). This stands in stark contrast to what some souls fabricate by deifying other things in an attempt to fill the inherent gaps in human understanding.

The key point here is that through revelation, a human being comes to know what they did not know before. They find answers to life's greatest existential questions, which inevitably accompany their thoughts from childhood to old age, especially if left unanswered:

- Who created me?
- Who gave me this life and this unique capacity for thought and reflection, setting me apart from all other creatures?
- What does He want from me?
- What comes after death?
- Who is the One to whom I instinctively turn in the heavens in times of hardship?
- ... and other similar questions that anyone who has ever sat alone and reflected—even briefly—would recognize.

However, we will set aside many of these questions for the sake of brevity and focus instead on the central question that touches on the theme of this book:

Why are there evils and evil people in the world if there is a God who represents goodness?

Why is there pain, deficiency, illness, and need?



With such profound existential questions, a stark contrast emerges between what authentic divine revelation offers and what human minds—no matter how intelligent—might conjure when they operate in the absence of the light and guidance of that revelation.

A Simple Comparison

To understand what human minds alone (without divine guidance) might produce as explanations for the existence of evil in the world, let's consider three perspectives:

- **A close perspective:** Here we see materialistic philosophies, existentialism, and absurdism, which ultimately regard human beings as mere particles—existing without purpose or meaning, and with no goal for their eventual demise. This leads to a bleak, pessimistic view of destiny and the future on one hand, and a call to exhaust all worldly pleasures (whether virtuous or sinful) on the other, while completely ignoring any higher purpose or accountability before death closes the opportunity. In this view, the center of existence becomes the human being.
- **A middle perspective:** This takes us to the distorted Christian tradition, which explains the presence of evil in the world as a result of Adam's sin, or as they call it, Original Sin. According to this view, all evil in the world stems from and is a consequence of this sin, including what they claim about Christ's suffering in their distorted faith: his being beaten, humiliated, crucified, and killed to bring about salvation, which they believe to be the sole and sufficient price of redemption for God—by torturing His son (who is also considered divine) to erase humanity's sin.
- **A distant perspective:** Here, we look at the example of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (who lived between 341 and 270 BCE). He contributed to the discussion of the problem of evil without any reference to religion or revelation. He tried to use it as a proof against the existence of God (in line with his naturalistic or atheistic philosophy, which denied both a Creator and accountability). He proposed two faulty premises and then built a flawed conclusion upon them, stating:
 - If there is a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and good, then there should be no evil.
 - There is evil in the world.
 - Therefore, there is no God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and good.

This conclusion, which attempts to portray a contradiction between the existence of such a God and the presence of evil, became known as the Epicurean paradox or dilemma.

Now the question is: what if we were to present this argument to a young Muslim child who has read the Qur'an and Sunnah? Would they see a contradiction as Epicurus did? Would they believe that humans were created in vain, without wisdom or purpose? Would they repeat the



falsehoods of Original Sin, salvation, and the crucifixion of God for another God, when the Qur’ān so clearly states that no soul bears the burden of another’s sin?

If we set aside materialistic philosophies and the distortions of Christianity to focus on Epicurus’ argument, we find that this young Muslim child already knows—clearly, directly, and unmistakably from the Qur’ān and Sunnah—that the first premise is fundamentally false. (This premise claims a contradiction between the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and good God and His allowance of evil.) Since the premise is flawed, the conclusion must certainly be false as well.

The Qur’ān—which is Allah’s final Book to humanity and the Muslims—clearly states that Allah has full knowledge of these evils, which could not exist or come into being except by His permission. This permission is for the purpose of testing and trial, a concept mentioned in numerous verses over the past 1400 years, plainly and without need for complex interpretation or philosophical reasoning.

Allah says: “[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving” (*Sūrat al-Mulk*: 2).

This testing—which includes both good and evil—is further emphasized in the verse: “Every soul will taste death, and We test you with evil and with good as trial; and to Us you will be returned” (*Sūrat al-Anbiyā*: 35).

This points to Allah’s decree and will (*al-mashī’ah al-qadariyyah* or *al-irādah al-kawniyyah*)⁽¹⁾ as He says: “And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits. But give good tidings to the patient” (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*: 155).

This is a rational and logical consistency that demonstrates the sincerity or falsehood of a person’s claim to faith and patience in Allah and their belief in His promise of reward and pleasure. Allah says: “Do the people think that they will be left to say, ‘We believe’ and they will not be tested?” (*Sūrat al-Ankabūt*: 2).

Thus, as I mentioned a moment ago, we can clearly see the great difference between using one’s reason in isolation from the light of revelation and using one’s reason guided by that light.

(1) Some refer to Allah’s will for good, what He loves to occur, what He commands in His rulings and legislation, and the ease He grants to believers, as *al-irādah al-shar’iyyah* (legislative will). In contrast, they refer to His allowance of evil and pain to occur in this created world—designed for the purpose of testing and trial, to reveal the goodness of the righteous and the evil of the wicked and thus establish the proof against them—as *al-irādah al-kawniyyah* (universal will). For example: Allah’s facilitation of acts of worship for the believers is *al-irādah al-shar’iyyah*, which He loves and commands. However, His allowing of harm and affliction—such as illness, war, and the like—is *al-irādah al-kawniyyah*, which must exist in order for people’s faith, patience, disbelief, and resentment to become clear in real life.



Reason can be likened to the power of sight, while revelation is the light that allows the eye to see correctly—whether it’s the light of the sun during the day or the light of fire in the dark. This was affirmed by Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him), who said about reason: “[It] is like the power of sight in the eye; if it is accompanied by the light of faith and the Qur’ān, it is like the eye illuminated by the light of the sun or fire. But if left by itself, it cannot perceive matters that it is inherently incapable of grasping”⁽¹⁾.

Of course, there are many other wisdoms in Islam behind creating this worldly life in such a way—with imperfection, pain, and evil. Islamic scholars of the past have spoken about these matters at length and with great depth, especially when discussing the wisdom behind the creation of Iblīs, the wisdom of divine decree—both its pleasant and bitter aspects—including the wisdom behind illness, trials, delayed answers to prayers, and the ongoing struggle between believers and disbelievers... and so on.

Islamic Scholars and the Problem of Evil

Perhaps the most famous scholar to have written in detail on this topic is Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah⁽²⁾, particularly in his book *Shifā’ al-‘Alīl fī Masā’il al-Qadar wal-Ḥikmah wal-Ta’līl* (The Healing of the Sick: On the Matters of Divine Decree, Wisdom, and Causation). Among the many valuable insights in the book is an entire chapter titled: *Purifying Divine Decree from Evil*⁽³⁾, echoing the words of the Prophet ﷺ in his supplication to Allah: “And evil is not attributed to You,” which we will explain shortly.

Ibn Qayyim also offers beneficial insights at the beginning of his book *Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa’adah wa Manshūr Wilāyat Ahl al-‘Ilm wal-‘Irādah* (The Key to the Abode of Happiness and the Manifest Authority of the People of Knowledge and Will).

As for his teacher, Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him), he wrote with profound depth and analysis on this subject, including his discussions and responses in the section on *Qadar* (Divine Decree), such as in *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*. A contemporary orientalist,

(1) From *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (3/339), and Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah is Taqī al-Dīn, Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Ḥarrānī (661–728 AH / 1263–1328 CE).

(2) Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: His full name was Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ayyūb ibn Sa’d ibn Ḥarīz ibn Makki Zayn al-Dīn al-Zur’ī, al-Dimashqī al-Ḥanbalī (691–751 AH / 1292–1350 CE). He is famously known as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, or simply Ibn al-Qayyim (so named because his father served as the superintendent of the al-Jawziyyah School in Damascus). One of his most prominent teachers was Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah, with whom he closely studied for approximately sixteen years.

(3) This refers to Chapter 21 in *Purifying Divine Decree from Evil and Its Entry into What Is Decreed*, which spans about thirty pages. It is followed by a chapter affirming Allah’s wisdom and another refuting the doubts of those who deny divine wisdom.



Dr. Jon Hoover of the University of Nottingham (Department of Theology and Religious Studies), compiled and analyzed many of these scattered gems in a highly valuable study, published in 2007, under the title: *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*. The term theodicy refers to a branch of theology within philosophy that addresses the reconciliation of the existence of evil with the belief in a perfect God.

We can take a quick look at the book through its summary on Amazon⁽¹⁾, which notes that despite Ibn Taymiyyah's (d. 1328 CE) fame for criticizing Islamic philosophy (meaning his critiques of *ʿIlm al-Kalām* as practiced by the Muʿtazilites, Ashʿarīs, and others), and despite his religious writings and reform of Sufism, his positive contributions to theology have not yet been fully appreciated. Here, the comprehensive study of Ibn Taymiyyah's theodicy helps to correct this gap. It presents and analyzes his writings on Allah's justice, His wise purposes, divine decree, the course of human life, the problem of evil, and his unique approach to divine theology. This confirms that Ibn Taymiyyah held an optimistic theodicy, emphasizing Allah's inherent goodness and asserting that all of His will is always and forever good—the best that can be for the eternal life of this world. This places Ibn Taymiyyah's theodicy apart from the theodicy of *kasb*⁽²⁾ developed by the Ashʿarīs, the Free Will Theodicy of the Muʿtazilites, and contrary to the views of thinkers like Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ʿArabī.

Now... let us give space to see how Christianity, under the efforts of the analytic theologian Alvin Plantinga in the last quarter of the twentieth century, reached some of what the Qurʾān has clearly and explicitly stated.

Here, we emphasize that it is only some of what the Qurʾān has mentioned, because no matter how much Christian theologians, thinkers, and philosophers strive to explore the divine wisdom in allowing the existence of evil, their understanding remains limited and confined to the framework of original sin, salvation, atonement, sacrifice, and then crucifixion.

(1) Link to the book on Amazon: www.amazon.co.uk/Taymiyyas-Theodicy-Perpetual-Optimism-Philosophy/dp/9004158472

(2) With the infiltration of pagan philosophical sophistry among some Muslims, sects emerged that questioned Allah's justice and power. The Qadariyyah sect denied Allah's decree and foreknowledge of human actions, while the opposing Jabriyyah claimed that humans are forced in what they do and choose. al-Ashʿarī (may Allah have mercy on him) attempted to formulate a middle ground with a philosophical idea called *kasb* (acquisition), which attributed the action and choice to Allah, while saying humans acquire them through their actions. However, he failed to recognize that this is essentially a form of compulsion as well. Allah refutes both sects in a single verse from Sūrat al-Insān: **"Indeed, this is a reminder, so whoever wills may take a way to his Lord. But you do not will unless Allah wills. Indeed, Allah is ever Knowing and Wise."** (Sūrat al-Insān: 29–30) This verse establishes human will, but it only occurs if Allah wills it, and His knowledge of it is based on predestination, not coercion.



Alvin Plantinga and the Problem of Evil

A rational perspective emerged in the Christian West regarding the problem of evil and the argument advanced by Epicurus. This perspective clearly demonstrates how his argument fails as proof for denying the existence of a Creator, since it can easily be dismissed by assuming the existence of a malevolent, cruel, or limited deity. In that case, the presence of evil would not contradict the existence of such a god. Moreover, the argument would not suffice as evidence that the existence of goodness proves the existence of a Creator—if their logic is that the existence of evil equals the non-existence of a Creator—highlighting to any rational person that Epicurus' dilemma is not a valid argument against the very existence of a Creator. It is only an objection against the idea of a perfect divine being—that is, the God of religions, who is pure and free from any deficiency in knowledge, power, or goodness.

Despite this perspective, the most famous modern philosophical response that refuted the imagined contradiction posed by Epicurus' dilemma (a perfect God and the existence of evil) was developed and presented by Alvin Plantinga in 1974 CE, through his Free Will Defense, as we mentioned earlier, in his famous book *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Through logical proofs, he was able to demonstrate the possibility of a divine reason (using human free will as an example) that justifies why God might choose to permit its occurrence (which is a form of goodness) even if it results in some evil.

With this, the philosophical problem of evil was effectively halted, its wheels stopped after centuries of debate in the Christian West. (Strangely, Arab atheists continue to recycle it exactly as it was inherited from Western atheist traditions—without a second thought.)

This shift was acknowledged by James R. Beebe of the University at Buffalo in his insightful article on the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (a peer-reviewed site), titled *Logical Problem of Evil*. There, he writes that philosophers today generally agree that the problem of evil now requires a wealth of new evidence to be even worth invoking as an argument against the existence of God. They now speak of the probabilistic problem of evil or the evidential problem of evil⁽¹⁾.

This brings us back to our simple comparison and raises the question: Do you now see how the minds of irreligious people and atheists flounder in confusion, far from the light of revelation and true religion?

Do you see how the Christian or Western rational and analytic efforts to resolve the problem of evil were delayed by more than 1400 years after the revelation of the Qur'an?

(1) Logical Problem of Evil | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: www.iep.utm.edu/evil-log



Now... what exactly did Alvin Plantinga accomplish? So, we can begin comparing what he said with what we have in Islam—indeed, to build upon and correct it.

Let's continue together...



(2) Reviewing What Alvin Plantinga Said

Discussing theology within philosophy has long been one of its most debated branches, especially between believers and atheists, or irreligious individuals and skeptics throughout the ages. Naturally, as we mentioned earlier, the heart of the religious defense has always revolved around the problem of evil (or theodicy), in which believers aim to demonstrate that the existence of evil does not contradict the existence of a perfect God.

Throughout history, non-believing philosophers have continually reintroduced Epicurus' dilemma, each adapting it according to their perspective and abilities to give it more force against objections. It has also become the easiest and most convenient tactic for any atheist in a debate to gain the sympathy of the audience (by simply mentioning a few personal or collective tragedies, or some evils occurring in the world here or there). Among the most well-known figures to have done this in modern times are Michael Peterson⁽¹⁾, J. L. Mackie⁽²⁾, and H. J. McCloskey⁽³⁾.

In this context, Alvin Plantinga found it necessary to offer a logical analysis of this dilemma to determine, based on the very rules of philosophy and logic, whether it was a sound argument that actually breaks the connection between the existence of evil and the existence of a perfect God.

We have already summarized the problem of evil—or Epicurus' dilemma—in two premises and a conclusion:

1. If there is a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and good, then evil cannot exist.
2. Evil exists in the world.
3. Therefore, there is no God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and good.

(1) Peterson, Michael L. 1998. *God and Evil*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, p.1.

(2) Mackie, J. L. 1955. *Evil and Omnipotence*. *Mind* 64, p.200.

(3) McCloskey, H. J. 1960. *God and Evil*. *Philosophical Quarterly* 10, p.97.



The defense that undermines this conclusion and breaks the connection—particularly with the first premise (since a faulty premise leads to a faulty conclusion)—is the one that critiques the logical consistency imagined in this dilemma. This defense relies on the idea that the perfect God of the religions might have reasons for permitting evil in the world. This can be called a morally sufficient reason, one that justifies allowing certain evil in the pursuit of a greater good.

The existence of such a logical possibility directly challenges the first premise, which assumes a contradiction without evidence (namely, that a perfect God cannot coexist with evil). This reveals a logical fallacy, known as begging the question⁽¹⁾.

To illustrate the possibility that the existence of some evil is justified by a logical or morally acceptable reason that brings about good, an example was given from our human experience before extending it to discuss God.

Mrs. Jones

Alvin Plantinga presents a hypothetical scenario where a nosy neighbor tells us that Mrs. Jones allowed someone to inflict pain on her infant daughter. We might be horrified by what she did (if we only saw this isolated snippet of the scene). But what if we learned that Mrs. Jones was actually having her child vaccinated to protect her against polio (which caused brief pain in exchange for great benefit for the rest of her life)? Our entire perspective on Mrs. Jones—and on the moral dimension of the situation—would change, despite the presence of some pain.

Now...

What if we apply this same scenario to Epicurus' dilemma? It would look like this:

1. If parents are good and love their children, they will not allow any pain to befall them.
2. There is pain experienced by their children.
3. Therefore... the parents are not good and do not love their children!

Clearly, the problem arises when logical consistency is flawed, or when there is an obvious or hidden logical fallacy.

From this point, Alvin Plantinga began to scale up this analogy to encompass the notion of free will (as a major good granted by God to humans) in exchange for some of the evil, pain, and suffering present in the world. He argues that:

(1) Logical fallacies are a type of deception or error—whether intentional or unintentional—that some people use or fall into during arguments, discussions, debates, or dialogues in an attempt to prove the correctness of their opinion. Among them is the fallacy known as begging the question. This means using a premise that implicitly contains the very point that needs to be proven, and then using it to derive the conclusion that one is trying to establish. Thus, it represents a type of circular reasoning.



Creating beings with free will is of great moral value, and eliminating all evil, pain, and suffering from the world would require God to remove this gift (i.e., human free will), which elevates humans to a higher status in their relationship with God and gives them the opportunity to choose good and love one another.

1. From this perspective, we see that achieving a greater good is connected to the presence of lesser evil, much like Mrs. Jones' scenario (a brief injection of pain in exchange for a lifetime of good). Accordingly, judging God because of the existence of evil requires delving into some details before reaching a conclusion. These details include understanding the immense value and rank of free will (or libertarian free will).

Alvin Plantinga, in his works⁽¹⁾, discusses this status from several angles, asserting that the highest moral value arises from choices made through free will. If God had created a world in which beings could only choose good, it would never be called free choice, and we could not describe them as possessing free will. Moreover, there would be no point in praising them morally for doing right, since they would have had no alternative. It's just as meaningless as praising your robotic vacuum cleaner for putting an empty soda can into the recycling bin⁽²⁾ instead of the trash.

Thus, the moral difference between humans and machines becomes clear: robots are programmed for specific actions (and thus cannot be blamed or praised for them), whereas humans, by virtue of possessing free will and choice, are blameworthy if they misuse it and praiseworthy if they use it well.

There's another common objection:

Why didn't God create beings with free will but ensure that they always choose good?

Alvin Plantinga summarizes the answer (though we will later comment on it from an Islamic perspective) by saying:

Creating human beings with free will and choice, yet ensuring that they only choose good, is a contradiction in itself (i.e., it is inherently impossible to achieve, no matter how great, profound, or challenging the concept). God is capable only of what is actually possible, regardless of its scale or difficulty. What matters is that it must be possible in reality, and thus impossible things—such as creating a flat triangle with four corners—are excluded.

Although Alvin Plantinga will elaborate on this point in detail—since he will need it for his defense here—it is fitting for us to mention the views of two of the greatest Muslim scholars on

(1) Alvin Plantinga 1974. *The Nature of Necessary-* 1977. *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

(2) Recycle bin is designated for certain items that can be repurposed and reused.



this topic. This demonstrates the precedence of Islamic thought, even on such essential points in philosophy, logic, or rational thought.

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah says: “As for the people of Sunnah, they hold that Allah is capable of all things, and everything that is possible is encompassed within this. As for that which is inherently impossible—such as something being both existent and nonexistent at the same time—this has no reality, it cannot be conceptualized as existing, and it is not called a ‘thing’ by the consensus of rational people. This includes things like creating something identical to Himself, and similar concepts.⁽¹⁾”

The Shaykh’s point is that if someone asks, “Can Allah create a god like Himself?” the response is that the second entity would not be a god, because it would be a creation.

Ibn al-Qayyim says, “Because the impossible is not a thing, it is not subject to power. Allah is capable of all things, and nothing possible lies outside His power whatsoever.⁽²⁾”

Now, Alvin Plantinga proceeds to present four possible worlds regarding the presence of moral goodness in free will and the resulting existence of evil, as follows:

World W1:

1. Allah creates people with free will and choice, possessing great moral value.
2. Therefore, Allah does not force them to do right in every situation in their lives.
3. Consequently, there is evil in this world.

World W2:

1. Allah does not create people with free will and choice of great moral value.
2. Therefore, He forces them to do right in every situation in their lives.
3. Consequently, there is no evil or suffering in this world.

World W3:

1. Allah creates people with free will and choice of great moral value.
2. But He forces them to do right in every situation in their lives.
3. Consequently, there is no evil or suffering in this world.

World W4:

1. Allah creates people with free will and choice of great moral value.
2. He does not force them to do right in every situation in their lives.
3. Yet, no evil or suffering occurs in this world.

(1) Minhāj al-Sunnah (2/294).

(2) Shifā’ al-‘Alīl (374).



Now... let us briefly review what Alvin Plantinga said in his comments on these four possibilities. When we look at them, we find that three are indeed possible, but one is impossible.

As for the possible worlds, they are the first world (W1), the second world (W2), and the fourth world (W4). This is because Allah is capable of creating persons with free will and choice, and from them, evil can result (this is the first world). Likewise, He is capable of creating persons without free will or choice, so no evil would result from them (this is the second world, though that would mean the absence of our very existence as we know it today, with our free will, thus eliminating the original problem altogether, which has not happened).

Finally, in the fourth world, Allah, who created people with free will and choice, could allow for the possibility that they all freely choose to do what is right and good. This is logically possible (even if the probability of it happening is extremely low), but it is not inherently impossible or absurd. This possibility is based on the potential for all people to choose to do what is right and good and obey Allah. (It is as if Plantinga is referring here to the situation in Paradise, where only those enter who are pleased with Allah as their Lord, Creator, Lawgiver, and Commander.)

As for the impossible world, it is the third world (W3), because it is impossible for Allah to create people with free will and choice and then compel them to choose what is right exclusively. (This is a contradiction, inherently impossible, or logically absurd.) The meaning of this would be the union of freedom and coercion in the same thing! It would be as if you said, “So-and-so is both present and absent” at the same time, or “tall and short” simultaneously... and so on.

Such existential impossibilities do not fall within the realm of Allah’s power, so we cannot demand them of Him, nor claim that He lacks complete power if He does not actualize them.

At this point, Alvin Plantinga expands his response, particularly addressing those who have tried to raise philosophical objections claiming that these matters are unrelated to God’s power—such as Anthony Flew⁽¹⁾, J. L. Mackie⁽²⁾, and others. They posed logical impossibilities or mental absurdities, like asking: “Can God make $2+2=5$?” To which Plantinga responds: “Well, then what would $2+3$ equal?”

(1) Flew, Anthony. 1955. “Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom”. In Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (eds.) *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. New York: Macmillan p.149.

It is well known that Anthony Flew spent nearly 50 years of his life as an atheist, vigorously defending atheism both intellectually and philosophically. However, at the age of 81, he announced his abandonment of atheism and his acceptance of deism (about six years before his death). In fact, in 2007, he published his most famous book: *There Is a God*.

(2) Mackie, J. L. 1955. *Evil and Omnipotence*. *Mind* 64, p. 209.



Similarly, they ask: “Can God create a rock so heavy that He cannot lift it?” Plantinga replies: As long as the rock has a finite size and weight, God can lift it. Any other conception (like a rock of infinite size or weight) is inherently impossible (that is, it has no existence, like a triangle with four corners). Since God created it with limits, it falls within His power. Thus, the question contains a logical fallacy.

Additionally, Plantinga highlights the apparent similarity between World W1 and World W4. The only difference is that in the fourth world, all people choose to do good, meaning that the only ones to blame for the existence of evil are the people themselves, not God⁽¹⁾.

Evaluation

Moderate and impartial philosophers (as in the previously mentioned article from the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) acknowledge that Alvin Plantinga’s defense successfully broke the philosophical link between the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and good God and the existence of evil. Thus, it became philosophically acceptable to affirm the traditional God of religions while acknowledging the existence of evil, without needing to challenge His perfection. In fact, the door was opened to propose any number of other explanations or reasons—as long as they were morally acceptable—besides the one Plantinga provided (what he mentioned about free will was just an example to dismantle the imagined connection that Epicurus and others had proposed).

The Problem of Gratuitous Evil

Despite the stubbornness and persistence of some who cling to the problem of evil even after it has been logically refuted (such as William L. Rowe, who confirms that it truly is an emotional issue between them and God), there remain certain attempts and objections that we should also consider—and observe how Alvin Plantinga responded to them.

For example:

J. L. Mackie, in his book *The Miracle of Theism*⁽²⁾, focused this time on a specific type of evil present in the world—namely, gratuitous evil or pointless evil. By this, he meant evil that goes beyond what is necessary to establish free will and choice. He argued that this supports the idea of the origin of evil in a world without a perfect God, because, in his view, such a God would have limited the amount of evil to just what was necessary, rather than allowing it to reach the overwhelming levels we sometimes see in the world.

(1) Plantinga, Alvin. 1974. *The Nature of Necessary*. Oxford University Press p. 190.

(2) Mackie, J. L. 1982. *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



Similarly, Paul Draper, in his book *Pain and Pleasure*⁽¹⁾, attempted to frame this dilemma logically in two premises and a conclusion:

1. There is gratuitous evil in the world.
2. The hypothesis of divine indifference provides a better explanation for this than religious beliefs.
3. Therefore, the evidence suggests the absence of the perfect or traditional God of the religions.

If we examine the matter carefully, we will find a strong point in favor of Alvin Plantinga, which is that these objectors actually concede the possibility of a moral reason for the existence of evil alongside the existence of a perfect or traditional God. Therefore, their objection focuses on a redefinition of this evil, emphasizing the amount of gratuitous or excessive evil as they perceive it.

From this point, Alvin Plantinga launched his response, using his famous example to demonstrate that the limitations of our human intellects in understanding all of God's reasons still stand strong—and this is supported by logic as well.

The No-See-Um Argument

In his No-See-Um argument⁽²⁾, Alvin Plantinga explains⁽³⁾:

If you search your tent for a large dog, like the well-known St. Bernard, and do not see one, it is reasonable to conclude that there isn't one inside. However, if you search your tent for a no-see-um mosquito (which bites with a force far greater than its tiny size) and don't see one, it is not reasonable to conclude that none are inside the tent, because they are simply too small to see with our limited vision.

Thus, those who assume that if there were good reasons for the existence of gratuitous evil, they would necessarily be within our grasp of understanding, are like those looking for the tiny mosquito in the tent, not the dog! Consequently, they deny the existence of those reasons simply because they cannot see them.

But... why should the situation be as they assume and not otherwise?

(1) Draper, Paul 1989. "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists". *Noûs*. *Noûs*, Vol. 23.

(2) Biting midges (*Ceratopogonidae*), also known as No-see-ums, are a type of mosquito that are difficult to see with the naked eye due to their size, which ranges from 1 to 4 millimeters.

(3) Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 466-67.

Alvin Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived" in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (I V P, 1993), p. 72.



The Problem of Natural Evil

As successful as Alvin Plantinga was in his previous argument—linking it to the limitations of human understanding compared to God’s wisdom and reasons—his last point, where he tried to explain natural evil, was not as strong or convincing. This is despite the fact that natural evil has a far greater impact on people and is a more effective tool for causing doubts about the Creator. Rational humans can respond to arguments about moral evil by attributing it to human wrongdoing and choices (that is, by placing the blame on people), but with natural evil, atheists and irreligious thinkers try to corner believers into facing the question of the Creator directly.

As just one example of how atheists and irreligious thinkers exploit this:

In December 2004, around 230,000 people perished due to the devastating tsunami that struck the shores of the Indian Ocean, including parts of Indonesia. In the weeks that followed, newspapers and magazines were filled with letters and articles posing the question: “Where was God?” Some programs—even in our own Muslim and Arab countries—hosted religious scholars to put them on the spot with this very question⁽¹⁾. Certain statements by foreign reporters even attacked the idea of God’s existence at the time, during an American debate held in 2005⁽²⁾.

Natural evil, in its broad sense (meaning evil that humans have no control over), can be divided into two forms:

1. Evil resulting from the decrees written for a person’s life, over which they have no control, such as being born with a physical disability or into a poor or criminal family, that influences their life.
2. Evil resulting from natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, and lightning strikes, affects even non-accountable living creatures.

(1) The truth is that the exploitation of the disaster in front of Muslims in the media was carried out in an even more devious way. They were asked: Are such disasters from God? (The clear position of the Qur’ān and Sunnah is that everything is in Allah’s control), or are they just natural disasters that can be explained by science, without reference to God or religion? If the Muslim chose the first answer, it would be as if he was inciting emotional hostility toward religion and toward God. If he chose the second answer, it would be as if he were declaring the separation of religion from life and embracing the notion that we are in an era where science alone explains everything—far removed from the concept of divine control and the idea of punishment through natural disasters... and so on.

Of course, this presents a deliberate confusion between the final cause and the efficient cause, which we will discuss shortly.

(2) Ron Roosenbaum, “Disaster Ignites Debate: Was God In the Tsunami?” New York Observer, January, 10, 2005: observer.com/2005/01/disaster-ignites-debate-was-god-in-the-tsunami



The truth is that this particular point (i.e., natural evil) has been one of the greatest challenges for Christian thought in particular, and for human thought in general, especially when disconnected from the revelation of the Creator Himself.

Thus...

The opinions and interpretations surrounding it have varied greatly, with each group confined to the limits of its own beliefs and worldview.

As for the Christian theological philosophers (such as Alvin Plantinga), who are considered the best among them to have spoken on this issue, their answers never strayed from generalizing the idea of free will and freedom of choice to encompass all things!

When we say all things here, we mean everything from the very structure of this universe in which we live and life itself—from planets, stars, and galaxies to demonic beings, which also possess free will and choice, enabling them to engage in evil acts. This perspective leads such thinkers to conclude that God has “left” many matters to unfold according to probability and randomness—similar to the indeterminacy of quantum mechanics⁽¹⁾—resulting in evils and harms. This, they argue, aligns with a comprehensive picture of free will within the universe and life.

As we mentioned earlier...

They are, unfortunately, among the weakest analysts on this issue, due to their exclusion of God’s will and decree in testing and trying people and revealing the true nature of their souls. Consequently, they neglected many of God’s attributes related to His power, greatness, and control over all things, which we will discuss shortly.

In general...

For now, we can set aside the first form of natural evil related to personal destiny (since its decree is part of the trial and test written for every human, and people’s responses to it vary). Let’s see what Alvin Plantinga said about the second form of natural evil—that is, natural disasters and similar events.

(1) Quantum mechanics is a branch of physics that focuses on the study of subatomic particles—those smaller than the atom—such as electrons, photons, and others. One of the most astonishing aspects for scientists studying this incredibly small scale is the probabilistic behavior observed in these particles, as opposed to deterministic (causal) behavior. In other words, unlike the study of atoms and larger entities, the behavior and properties of these particles cannot be precisely predicted at the same time.

Some suggest that this is due to the limitations of our tools in uncovering the secrets of this tiny world, rather than a lack of laws governing it.



Alvin Plantinga's Explanation

In his book *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Alvin Plantinga references a hypothesis from St. Augustine (p. 26), in which Augustine suggested that Satan was the cause of most of the world's evils. Here, Plantinga presents a theological view, stating:

God created Satan and his followers alongside the angels long before creating humans. However, this Satan and his followers (whom Plantinga calls mighty nonhuman spirits) rebelled against God, and since that time, they have been spreading corruption in everything.

From this, Plantinga argues that—according to this religious perspective—natural disasters (apart from those that are divine punishments) are caused by Satan and his followers among these mighty nonhuman spirits. These beings also possess free will and choice, like humans, but we cannot see them or observe how they cause such disasters⁽¹⁾.

Considering this view presented by Alvin Plantinga as a possible response to the problem of natural evil in the world, we see that it doesn't stray far from what other thinkers have said or attributed to him. They view the sin of Adam and Eve as the beginning of the creation of this universe and the descent into it—that is, the descent from Paradise (the realm of perfection and divine order) to this worldly life (the realm of evil, pain, randomness, and incidental suffering) for the sake of salvation and atonement. In this way, the cause ultimately returns to the doctrine of original sin in Christianity, under which natural evils—such as wildfires harming innocent people and animals, as well as deadly diseases, plagues, AIDS, and the deaths or killings of innocent people, including children—are justified.

Now...

What is the Islamic perspective on all of this?

(1) Alvin Plantinga presented this argument in his book *God, Freedom, and Evil*, published in 1974, specifically on pages 57 to 59 of the 1977 edition.

Plantinga, Alvin 1977. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p. 57: 59.



(3) The Islamic Perspective on the Problem of Evil

As we pointed out at the beginning of this topic, the root of the shortcomings in some philosophical and Christian responses to the problem of evil lies in their collective absence of the light of true revelation from Allah, the Lord of the worlds. Thus, their reasoning—though vigorous—lacks true knowledge, and their errors in various matters will become evident as we continue this comparison.

Islam is distinguished by its abundance of clear texts from the Qurʾān and Sunnah, as well as hints that can form a sound understanding of Allah’s wisdom behind the existence of evil, pain, and deficiency in this worldly life. These texts speak of divine justice, divine decree and predestination, tests and trials, and the unveiling of realities—all of it based on authentic revelation that has neither been altered nor corrupted, and in whose formulation no human intervention occurred (this is its unique advantage over other philosophical efforts).

So, let us review some of these points together...

Affirming the Perfection of Allah

One of the most important steps before discussing the perfection of Allah’s wisdom in His actions, and likewise the perfection of His attributes, is to reflect on how to rationally establish these perfections—especially as if we are starting from scratch with an atheist or irreligious person.

We say:

Sound reason affirms that nothing comes into existence (after having been non-existent) except as a result of a cause, an initiator, or a creator. Sound reason rejects the idea of something emerging from nothing, or pure non-existence, without any cause, initiator, or creator. This principle has underpinned all human knowledge and science from the dawn of history to today. Otherwise:



Imagine, for example, if someone said: things simply emerge from nothing or non-existence without cause or initiator. Would such a statement—besides contradicting what we observe daily in our lives—form the basis for any beneficial knowledge?

What if rain fell without any cause? Would it make sense for a branch of science to emerge investigating rainfall to harness its benefits or avoid harm? Or would such a branch of science be entirely superfluous because there's no governing principle?

Thus, sound reason recognizes that every event (after not existing) must have a cause, initiator, or creator. This is what the Qur'ān referred to when it said: **“Or were they created by nothing, or were they themselves the creators?”** (*Sūrat al-Ṭūr*: 35)

Now the question is:

Why have philosophers (even those not adhering to a particular religion) acknowledged the need for a first cause from which everything originates (though they differ in how they describe or define it, they agree it must be necessary in existence)?

The answer:

It is logically impossible for causes or initiators to regress infinitely into the past or eternity, for in that case, nothing would ever have come into existence.

Example:

Let's imagine a soldier waiting for an order from his commander to fire his weapon. But the commander is waiting for an order from his own commander, and that commander is waiting for another... and so on. If this chain continues infinitely, the shot would never be fired. However, if the chain terminates at a commander who does not receive orders from anyone (someone unique and different from the others), the shot will be fired.

Thus, every commander in the chain can be dispensed without affecting the result (the firing of the shot), and each can therefore be described as possible in existence—their existence isn't necessary. However, the first commander is unique and indispensable; without him, the shot would never be fired. Therefore, he alone can be described as necessary in existence—without his existence, the shot would never be fired.

The same applies to this universe and the existence we witness. If it were simply a chain of causes leading back infinitely into the past, neither you nor I nor anything else—nor the universe itself—would exist. Our existence now proves that “the shot has been fired,” that is, there must be a first, eternal Creator who has no beginning and whose existence does not depend on anything else. This is because dependence on something else is a deficiency, and deficiency contradicts the perfection of the necessary eternal being. The dependent either precedes or is accompanied by



need. We've already agreed that reason requires the acknowledgment of the Necessary Being (*Wājib al-Wujūd*).

Every creature has Allah preceding it in existence and is clearly dependent on Him. Every apparent cause in the world ultimately stems from a hidden cause—Allah. Just as Allah is the First of all causes, so too do all causes ultimately end with Him. Thus, Allah says about Himself in the Qur'ān: **“He is the First and the Last, the Ascendant and the Intimate, and He is, of all things, Knowing.”** (*Sūrat al-Ḥadīd*: 3)

And He says of His independence from His creation and His possession of everything, while needing nothing: **“To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. Indeed, Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy.”** (*Sūrat Luqmān*: 26)

We, as His creation, are in constant and perpetual need of Him: **“O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy.”** (*Sūrat Fāṭir*: 15)

If we understand this (i.e., that the Creator is independent of everything), we realize that all other attributes of perfection logically follow, in addition to what can be observed of His magnificent creation. He is truthful, because truthfulness is a perfection and lying is a deficiency (for a liar is either trying to cover up, appease, or is afraid, and none of this befits the Perfect, the Exalted). He is all-knowing because ignorance is a deficiency (He knows what was, what will be, what is, and what would have been if it were to happen). And so it is with the rest of His attributes: He is the All-Aware, the Wise, the Compeller, the Most High, the Subduer, the Sovereign... All these attributes are known in their meanings to us, but their modes are unlike ours. Allah says: **“There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.”** (*Sūrat al-Shūrā*: 11)

He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing (in meanings we comprehend), but His hearing is not like ours, and His sight is not like our sight. If even His creation varies in how they possess a single attribute—such as the difference in hearing and sight between humans, falcons, dogs, cats, frogs, octopuses, ants, etc.—how much greater is the difference between them and their Creator?

Now the question is...

Is it more perfect for Allah to create beings who worship Him without free will and choice (such as the angels), or is it more perfect that His creation includes those who worship Him with free will and choice?

Are the angels superior, or are the righteous among humans superior?

This question has long occupied many Muslim scholars and others, both in the past and in modern times, out of fear of speaking about it without knowledge and attributing an incorrect preference to Allah. There is no doubt that the debate is not about whether to create beings with



free will or not (such as jinn and humans), but rather about whether the righteous among them are superior in rank to the angels.

This reveals the consensus among Muslims that it is part of the perfection of Allah's creation (i.e., His attribute of creation) to bring into existence beings who have free will and choice, through which they worship Him. No one, to our knowledge, has objected to this since the beginning of Islam—unlike what we have seen in Christian thought and Alvin Plantinga's earlier defense.

Returning to the question, we find that:

The majority of Muslims—especially the virtuous generations and their followers—held that the human species is superior to the angelic species, because reason acknowledges the honor of the weaker agent when they perform the same act as a stronger agent, or something close to it.

Meaning:

If a strong man lifts a stone a certain distance, and a weak man lifts the same stone the same distance, there's no doubt that the effort exerted by the weak man is several times that of the strong man. Thus, he receives more recognition and respect than the strong one. The more burdens, difficulties, and obstacles he faces compared to the strong, the more his recognition increases, even if he doesn't achieve the same level of success.

This closely resembles the situation of humans compared to angels. On one hand, humans are surrounded by desires and worldly needs; on the other hand, they are weaker than angels in strength, worship, and obedience. An example of this is the authentic *ḥadīth* from the Prophet ﷺ: "The heavens groaned, and it is right for them to groan. There is not a space of four fingers in them, but that there is an angel placing his forehead in prostration to Allah."⁽¹⁾

Or as he said in the famous *ḥadīth* of *al-Isrā'* and *al-Mi'rāj* (the night journey to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā and ascension to *Sidrat al-Muntahā* in the heavens): "... Then al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr (the Frequented House) was raised for me (which is in the seventh heaven, and corresponds to the Ka'bah for us). I asked Jibrīl about it, and he said: 'This is al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr. Every day, seventy thousand angels pray in it, and once they leave, they never return.'⁽²⁾"

This tells us of the vast numbers of angels worshipping Allah, as also mentioned in another authentic *ḥadīth* from the Prophet ﷺ: "Indeed, in the heavens there is not a space of a handspan except that there is an angel placing his forehead (in prostration to Allah) or his feet standing (in

(1) Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan*, no. (2312), and he graded it ḥasan; authenticated by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī*.

(2) Narrated by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. (3207), and by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. (164).



prayer to Allah). Then he recited: ‘And indeed, we are those who line up [for prayer], and indeed, we are those who glorify [Allah].⁽¹⁾’

Such worship is beyond human capability due to their physical weakness and the burdens, hardships, and worldly needs they bear—burdens not found in angels, who are naturally inclined toward obedience to Allah and free from desires or life’s distractions.

Shaykh Muḥammad al-Saffārīnī al-Ḥanbalī (may Allah be merciful to him) said: “... And due to the great difference of opinion and the divergence of the statements of the scholars of *kalām* (speculative theology) and others in its details, we said in verse:

*And in our view, the righteous among humankind hold sway,
Their honor above our Lord’s angels, as is known and well in display.
And whoever says otherwise, he has spoken a lie,
And overstepped the truth, letting falsehoods fly.*

(In our view) refers to the people of the Sunnah, especially those of the traditionalist school and the righteous predecessors and leading scholars of the ummah. They say and believe in (the preference of the righteous among humans)—whether male or female. The term “*bashar*” (humans) refers to both singular and plural and may also be used in the dual form or as “*abshār*” in plural. The “righteous” here refer to the Prophets—peace be upon them—and the saints. The Prophets are superior to the saints, and both are superior to the angels. Some have even said that every righteous person is superior to the angels.⁽²⁾”

There is even stronger and clearer consensus regarding the honor of humankind over the jinn, supported by numerous proofs from the Qur’ān and Sunnah. But since our aim here is not to delve into lengthy detail, a few examples will suffice.

One such piece of evidence demonstrating the superiority of the human race over both the angels and the jinn is Allah’s statement: **“And [mention] when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate to Adam,’ so they prostrated, except for Iblīs. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.”** (*Sūrat al-Baqarah: 34*)

This encompassed the honoring of Ādam (as a symbol of humanity) over the angels and the jinn, as the command to prostrate was one of honor and greeting (which was permissible before

(1) Narrated by al-Ṭabarī in his *Tafsīr* (21/127), and held authentic by al-Albānī in *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah*, no. (1059).

(2) Lawāmi‘ al-Anwār al-Bahiyyah wa Sawāti‘ al-Asrār al-Athariyyah li Sharḥ al-Durra al-Muḍiyyah fī ‘Aqd al-Firqa al-Marḍiyyah), al-Maktab al-Islāmī – Dār al-Khānī, Beirut, 1411 AH / 1991 CE, (p. 398).



it was later prohibited in Islam, as seen in the Qur'ānic account of the prostration of Yūsuf's brothers, along with his father and mother, to him).

Iblīs himself understood this honor, and it sparked his envy and disobedience to Allah. We read this in his words: **“Do You see this one whom You have honored above me? If You delay me until the Day of Resurrection, I will surely bring his descendants under my control, except for a few.”** (*Sūrat al-Isrā'*: 62)

Thus, despite being weaker than the angels and weaker than the jinn, humans surpass both in rank and honor when they obey Allah and worship Him out of love and choice. In fact, what is required for them to pass the test and enter Paradise and avoid Hellfire is the bare minimum of faith and acknowledgment of Allah as Lord, God, Creator, and the One to be obeyed—even if that acknowledgment comes at the very end of their lives.

It even applies after death in the test of the Day of Judgment for those who died young (fetuses and small children), the mentally incapacitated, the extremely elderly, the deaf, and those who did not receive the message or a messenger—all those who were not reached by Allah's proof or His call to obedience, as we will explain shortly.

But the key point here is: The predominance of the opinion that the righteous among humans (as a chosen and free-willed species) are superior to angels, who are naturally inclined to obedience and free from sin, as Allah said in the Qur'ān:

- **“... They disobey not Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded.”** (*Sūrat al-Taḥrīm*: 6)
- **“And those near Him are not prevented by arrogance from His worship, nor do they tire.”** (*Sūrat al-A'rāf*: 206)
- **“They glorify [Him] night and day [and] they do not slacken.”** (*Sūrat al-Anbiyā'*: 20)
- **“Indeed, those near your Lord are not too proud to worship Him. They glorify Him and to Him they prostrate.”** (*Sūrat Fuṣṣilat*: 38)

Ibn Taymiyyah greatly expanded upon reviewing the various opinions and their branches concerning this matter, dedicating nearly fifty pages to it in *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, volume 4, from page 344 to 392.

It is notable that he differentiated between comparisons of individual humans and individual angels, comparisons between the human species and the angelic species, and between righteous humans and the angels, who are all inherently righteous. He pointed out that much of the disagreement in opinion stemmed from failing to differentiate or specify the scope of the preference or honor being discussed.



For example, the disbelievers among humans occupy a lower rank than even animals, let alone angels, in the sense that animals instinctively avoid harm, while disbelievers harm themselves by knowingly exposing themselves to Allah’s punishment.

He reviewed the various views regarding the verse: **“And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.”** (*Sūrat al-Isrā’*: 70)

He also examined the opinions of those who objected to the prostration of the angels: **“He said, ‘O Iblīs, what prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My Hands? Were you arrogant [then], or were you [already] among the haughty?’”** (*Sūrat Ṣād*: 75)

Moreover, he cited the preference and honor granted to the righteous among the descendants of Ādam by the fact that Allah created their father, Ādam, with His own Hands—not by the command “Be,” as He did with the angels. He mentioned the ḥadīth of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) in this context⁽¹⁾.

In general, he says on page 344: “‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām said: ‘Allah has not created any creation more honored to Him than Muḥammad.’ It was said to him: ‘Not even Jibrīl or Mīkā’il?’ He replied: ‘Do you know what Jibrīl and Mīkā’il are? They are created beings subjugated, like the sun and the moon. Allah has not created any creation more honored to Him than Muḥammad ﷺ.’”

Ibn Taymiyyah commented on this by saying: “I have not known any of the companions to oppose this view, and this is the well-known opinion among those associated with the Sunnah from the followers of the four Imams and others, which is that the Prophets and the saints are superior to the angels.”

He also states in volume 11 of *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, page 95: “And Allah created Ādam from clay. When He shaped him and breathed into him of His spirit and commanded the angels to prostrate to him, preferring him over them by teaching him the names of all things, by creating him with His own Hands, and by other distinctions; he and the righteous among his descendants are superior to the angels, even though these (humans) are created from clay and those (angels) from light.”

(1) This ḥadīth has weak chains, such as those narrated by al-Ṭabarānī in his *al-Mu‘jam al-Awsaṭ* and *al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr*, but it also has chains that scholars have deemed authentic, as noted by the scholar Aḥmad Shākir. For example, it was narrated by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Imām Aḥmad in his book *al-Sunnah*, and by al-Dāramī in his book *al-Radd ‘alā al-Marīsī* (p. 34), through ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṣāliḥ, from al-Layth ibn Sa’d, from Hishām ibn Saad, from Zayd ibn Aslam, from ‘Aṭā’ ibn Yasār, from ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, in which the Prophet ﷺ said: “The angels said: ‘Our Lord, You have given the children of Ādam the world where they eat, drink, and wear garments, while we glorify Your praise, neither eating nor drinking nor engaging in leisure. Just as You have made the world for them, make the Hereafter for us?’ He said: ‘I will not make the righteous among the descendants of those whom I created with My own Hands (i.e., the righteous from the descendants of Ādam, whom I created with My Hands) like the one to whom I said: ‘Be’, and he was.”



Ibn al-Qayyim said: “The righteous among humankind are superior to the angels because the worship of the angels is free from the blemishes of personal desires and human inclinations. Their acts of worship come with no resistance, hindrance, or obstacle, like breathing is to the living. As for human worship, it occurs amid the struggles of the soul, the suppression of desires, and the opposition of natural inclinations—making it more complete. For this reason, most scholars favor the righteous among humankind over the angels for this and other reasons.⁽¹⁾”

Why didn't Allah create the righteous directly in Paradise?

As we saw in the previous point, since it is more perfect for Allah to create beings with their own will, He does so, because they are more deserving of praise than creatures without choice. This is what Alvin Plantinga attempted to allude to in his example of the robot that can only do what it is programmed to do.

But here arises a question that seems, to its proposer, to hold the key to resolving the problem of evil, pain, and deficiency in worldly life: Why doesn't Allah create the righteous directly in Paradise, bypassing all of this (worldly life) or its witnessing and its impact?

For a logical answer to this question, let's reflect together on this hypothesis: What if Allah created the righteous directly in Paradise?

Paradise—by its general descriptions in the religions, and especially in Islam, the true religion—is the perfect realm where there is no evil, no pain, no deficiency. How could there be, when Allah, as He will transform the earth and the heavens on the Day of Resurrection, will also transform the creation of people into the most perfect form, free from weakness, illness, or need? All will be in the prime of youth, shining like the moon and the luminous stars in the sky. Everything each person desires and craves, of all kinds of lawful pleasures⁽²⁾, will be found without any hardship or toil.

(1) Ṭarīq al-Hijratayn (pp. 349–350).

(2) We have intentionally clarified that these are lawful pleasures, in response to attempts by some Christians and atheists to distort them, claiming that these pleasures are (unrestricted) and lack the boundaries of propriety or divine law. This directly contradicts the words of Allah Almighty: “**Say, ‘My Lord has only forbidden immoralities—what is apparent of them and what is concealed—sin, oppression without right, and that you associate with Allah that for which He has not sent down authority, and that you say about Allah that which you do not know.’**” (*Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*: 28)

Thus, there is no intimacy in Paradise except with what Allah has made permissible for the men and women of Paradise—whether with their spouses or with the ḥūr ʿīn. Likewise, there are no intoxicants in Paradise that cloud the mind; the wine of Paradise (that is, its juice pressed from fruits) contains none of the corruption that appears in the wine of this world when it has been left for more than three days. As for the *ghilmān* of Paradise (meaning the young boys), they are for the delight of the eyes and the natural, spontaneous joy of companionship—not, as some mockers claim, for sexual deviancy, which is a despicable slander. And so it is with the rest of the pleasures of Paradise.



The Qur'ān mentions many types of these pleasures, such as everlasting happiness, continual renewal of delight without boredom or weariness, work that we love, intimacy, enjoyment of all manner of beauty, clothing, food, drink, and dwelling. This can be summarized by citing some of the following verses from Allah's words:

- **“Indeed, those who have said, ‘Our Lord is Allah,’ and then remained steadfast—the angels will descend upon them, [saying], ‘Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.’”** (*Sūrat Fuṣṣilat: 31*)
- **“And those who feared their Lord will be led to Paradise in groups until, when they reach it while its gates have been opened and its keepers say, ‘Peace be upon you; you have become pure; so enter it to abide eternally therein,’ they will enter.”** (*Sūrat al-Zumar: 34*)
- **“There they will have whatever they wish, and with Us is more.”** (*Sūrat Qāf: 35*)
- **“Gardens of perpetual residence; they will enter them with whoever was righteous among their forefathers, their spouses, and their descendants. And the angels will enter upon them from every gate.”** (*Sūrat al-Furqān: 16*)
- ... and other verses and ḥadīths.

Now the question is:

How could these righteous ones truly grasp the distinction between the station of *‘ubūdiyyah* (servitude) and *maḥdūdiyyah* (limitation) in their role as *makhlūqīn* (created beings) of Allah, and the station of *ulūhiyyah* (divinity) or *rubūbiyyah* (lordship) of Allah as their Creator?

How could they comprehend the value of the blessings, goodness, and guidance Allah has granted them if they had no awareness of need, evil, pain, and misguidance?

Would they truly appreciate the worth of eternity or everlastingness if they never experienced death or weakness?

Could they recognize the value of health and beauty without ever encountering illness or ugliness?

What about virtues like kindness, generosity, altruism, courage, loyalty, forgiveness, and mercy?

How would they grasp the greatness of Allah and the perfection of His attributes, which He has so graciously bestowed upon them?

How would they come to know the depth of His love for them if they never witnessed the reasons for and expressions of that love?



We could continue listing countless things, concepts, knowledge, and values that would lose their true meaning and worth if we imagine that people were placed directly in Paradise or into a life of perfection.

In fact:

How would differences in status and rank between these free-willed beings manifest? For it is a rational necessity that freedom of will and choice among them leads to differences in outcomes. How would they grasp the reality of these differences in their ranks in Paradise if these distinctions were never revealed through actual deeds that reflect their true selves and various levels?

We won't dwell too long on this point. What we've mentioned suffices to illustrate its facets. Now it's necessary to put the key concepts we've reached into a logical sequence:

1. The perfection of the attribute of creation is that Allah creates beings who are possessors of free will and choice, alongside those who are not.

2. These free-willed beings, if Allah placed them directly in Paradise, would miss out on practical knowledge and a deep understanding of the meanings of existence, Allah's attributes, the reality of their servitude to Him, their dependence upon Him, and the magnitude of His blessings. They would also not comprehend the reason behind their varying ranks in Paradise, which necessarily stem from their free will and choices.

3. Allah has decreed for every soul its unique trial and test that fits its inherent nature, revealing the good or evil, faith or disbelief, obedience or disobedience that He knows within it. Every choice any of us makes is by Allah's will and wise decree. He knows the necessary components of each test for every individual: poverty reveals patience in hardship and generosity despite constraints, while wealth reveals restraint against desires and generosity despite abundance. Even being male or female is a test from Allah, tailored to the inner nature and appropriate for each one—men's trials relate to leadership and responsibility, and women's to responsibility, obedience, and modesty, and so on. All of these trials are not to reveal something unknown to Allah (far be it from Him!), but rather to establish evidence upon each soul, for some to enter Paradise and others to enter Hell.

4. As for those who enter the Fire, they refused to acknowledge Allah's existence in the unseen, rejected the gift of *'aql* (reason) He granted them to recognize the clearest truth of all existence! They rejected His commands and prohibitions. Thus, they enter the Fire despite His power to compel them to obedience and faith. But He did not create them for compulsion; He created them as free agents, and He accepts no faith except that which arises from their own will and choice. Allah says: **"There is no compulsion in religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong.**



So, whoever disbelieves in ṭāghūt and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest handhold with no break in it.” (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*: 256).

Whoever understands this realizes the superficiality of atheists and non-religious people who imagine that Allah has ‘failed’ to make Himself known to people to believe in Him, or that He is ‘trying’ to make everyone believe in Him but ‘cannot’! They liken Him to humans or to the laughable pagan deities. Allah says: **“And if your Lord had willed, those on earth would have believed—all of them entirely. Then, [O Muḥammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?”** (*Sūrat Yūnus*: 99).

And He also says: **“And if We had willed, We could have given every soul its guidance, but the Word from Me will come into effect [that] ‘I will surely fill Hell with jinn and people all together.’”** (*Sūrat al-Sajdah*: 13).

And He also says: **“If We will, We can send down a sign from the heavens so that their necks would bend before it in humility.”** (*Sūrat al-Shu‘arā’*: 4).

Thus, even the signs and miracles granted by Allah to His messengers were not intended to compel belief in everyone who witnessed them. Rather, they were sufficient to reassure the believers that these messengers were sent by Allah, the Creator, who controls the laws of the universe.

At the same time, they left room for obstinate skeptics to attribute these signs to magic. Therefore, not everyone who witnessed Allah’s signs came to believe: **“So, We sent upon them the flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood, clear signs; but they were arrogant and were a criminal people.”** (*Sūrat al-A‘rāf*: 132).

The point is: Allah has created all people with the freedom of choice, as He says: **“And say, ‘The truth is from your Lord. So let whoever wills believe and let whoever wills disbelieve.’”** (*Sūrat al-Kahf*: 29).

It is the disbelievers who have chosen for themselves the fate of punishment and the fire, not Allah! He says: **“Has there not come to them the news of those before them – the people of Nūḥ, ‘Ād, Thamūd, the people of Ibrāhīm, the companions of Madyan, and the towns overturned? Their messengers came to them with clear proofs, but Allah would not wrong them; they used to wrong themselves.”** (*Sūrat al-Tawbah*: 70).

5. As for those who enter Paradise, they are the ones who possessed at least the minimal level of belief in Allah’s unseen existence, acknowledged with the minds Allah granted them. They believed in the necessity of obeying His commands as Lord and Deity. For the One who creates is the One who possesses the right to command, as Allah says: **“Surely, His is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, the Lord of all worlds.”** (*Sūrat al-A‘rāf*: 54).



Even if they acknowledged this only at the very end of their lives—as we mentioned earlier (even on their deathbed, just before the soul reaches the throat)—such people will be granted entry into Paradise by Allah’s grace, even if they first enter Hell to settle certain rights and debts they owe to others⁽¹⁾. Ultimately, their final destination will be Paradise and eternal bliss, for they chose Allah, the world of complete goodness and delight (similar to the fourth world in Plantinga’s model). This represents the minimal degree of faith. What, then, of those who surpass this and attain higher levels of belief—those who believe in Allah with all their hearts and minds, love Him, and obey Him to the best of their human ability?

6. This illustrates the necessity of varying tests for different souls. For example, some souls will face only a single question (or a single test) on the Day of Resurrection—such as fetuses, young children⁽²⁾ who died before maturity, the mentally disabled, the senile, the deaf, and those who never received the message of a prophet or messenger. All of these individuals did not encounter Allah’s proof or His invitation to obedience during their lifetimes.

7. Their test will come after they acknowledge Allah’s Divinity on the Day of Resurrection and after they witness the conditions of humanity on that day. Then, Allah will test them as mentioned in the authentic narration reported by Imām Aḥmad and others from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who said: “Four will protest on the Day of Resurrection: a deaf man who heard nothing, a feeble-minded man (one lacking reason), an old man (senile and unable to understand or hear), and a man who died during a period (when no messenger came to him). As for the deaf man, he will say: ‘O my Lord, Islam came but I heard nothing.’ As for the feeble-minded man, he will say: ‘O my Lord, Islam came and the children would throw dung at me.’ As for the old man, he will say: ‘O my Lord, Islam came, but I could not understand anything.’ And as for the one who died in the period, he will say: ‘O my Lord, no messenger came to me.’ So He will take their pledges to obey

(1) As in the well-known ḥadīth about intercession reported in both Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, as well as other collections.

(2) It is mentioned in some ḥadīths that they (these individuals) will be tested on the Day of Resurrection, while in other ḥadīths it is stated that Allah already knows what they would have done, by His complete and all-encompassing knowledge. There is no contradiction between these reports: His knowledge of what they would have done is like His knowledge of what any one of us will do and where we will end up in the Hereafter—whether in Paradise or Hell—before we even do it. As for His testing them, this is an aspect of His justice, establishing the proof against all of His creation, as we mentioned earlier. Otherwise, the disbeliever might object, saying: “Why did the child who died young enter Paradise (if his death was the reason for his entry)?” Even if it is said that the children of Muslims enter Paradise, we respond: it is because they are those whom Allah’s prior knowledge decreed would be the children of Muslims, thereby combining both realities.



Him (in anything He commands), and He will send to them a command: ‘Enter the Fire.’ By the One in whose Hand is the soul of Muḥammad, if they enter it, it will be cool and safe for them.⁽¹⁾”

This test is neither impossible nor difficult for them. We have witnessed similar sacrifices from those whom Allah tested in this world, and we have seen such examples among the believers throughout time, in every nation and message, like those who were offered death in exchange for abandoning their faith in Allah but refused. For instance, in the well-known hadith about the People of the Ditch mentioned in the Qur’an in Sūrat al-Burūj (the story of the tyrant king who dug a trench filled with fire to cast the believers of his people into it), there is a narration in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim where the Prophet ﷺ said: “A woman was brought to be thrown into the fire or to renounce her faith, and she was carrying a suckling child. She hesitated (that is, she hesitated out of maternal instinct), so her child said to her: ‘O mother, be patient, for you are upon the truth!’”

The point here is that the woman approached death and was thrown into the fire with full certainty in Allah. Allah increased her certainty by making her suckling child speak, and she cast herself into the fire, knowing that Allah would meet her with goodness and Paradise.

The question arises: Will it be impossible for those whom Allah tests on the Day of Judgment to do the same after seeing with their own eyes the certainty of Allah, His taking of their covenant, and their full realization that He is their Creator and capable of all things?

8. As for the other tests of people in this worldly life, they differ among individuals and vary in form according to Allah’s divine decree, justice, knowledge, and wisdom, which are suited to revealing the inner realities of each soul individually—whether it is faithful or disbelieving in practice—so they may be held accountable. This includes the era we are born in, our country, religion, family, health or illness, poverty or wealth, and so on...

All of it is built upon the (justice) of Allah for each soul individually, according to what He knows of it and what is best for manifesting its inner nature. It is not based on (equality), which would set the same test for different souls (imagine giving the same exam to both first-graders and high school seniors!). Equality is not applicable to different things. If you have three children—a toddler, a boy, and a grown youth—when you buy them clothes, you do not bring them all the same size to “equalize” them.

Instead, you bring each one their proper size, which suits them, thus doing justice among them. From here: every believer in Allah (the perfect) must trust in His justice and wisdom... that He will not test anyone beyond their capacity or endurance. Allah says: “**Allah does not burden a**

(1) The ḥadīth is reported by Imām Aḥmad, Ibn Ḥibbān, and others, and authenticated by al-Albānī in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi‘ no. 881.



soul beyond its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned.” (*Al-Baqarah: 286*)

When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was asked about who among people suffers the most severe trials, he said: “The prophets, then those closest to them, then those closest. A man is tested according to the level of his religious commitment. If he is firm in his faith, his trial is increased, and if he is weak in his faith, his trial is lightened.”⁽¹⁾

Thus, another wisdom behind the scattering of people across the earth becomes clear: if Allah had willed, He could have made them all the same, but this would contradict His will to manifest their unique differences, free will, and choices. He says: **“If your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ, except those upon whom your Lord has bestowed mercy. And for that He created them.”** (*Hūd: 118–119*)

Indeed, we see the same test for two different people, yet we see different outcomes. Two people may face severe illness or extreme poverty—one of them remains patient while the other complains, steals, kills, or even disbelieves in Allah. Two people are born into Christianity and are exposed to Islam and monotheism—one remains Christian while the other embraces Islam. Similarly, two people are born into Islam and are exposed to the same temptations or doubts—one remains steadfast in their faith, while the other apostatizes or becomes an atheist. Likewise, two individuals may be persecuted in the path of Allah or leave Islam—one clings to his faith, whether outwardly or secretly, while the other abandons it or disbelieves.

That is why we find amazing stories throughout history and even today of believers who endured the most severe forms of torture and never renounced their faith. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Among those before you, a man would be seized and dug into the earth, then a saw would be placed upon his head, splitting him into two, and his flesh would be combed with iron combs, stripping his flesh from his bones. None of this would deter him from his religion.”⁽²⁾

9 – There remains here a final point highlighting the perfect justice of Allah with all His chosen creatures. Even though His encompassing knowledge tells that not all of them will enter Paradise, He assigned for each of them a place in Paradise and another in Hell, to declare that it was never

(1) Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in his *Sunan* (no. 2398) and authenticated by al-Albānī.

(2) Narrated by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (no. 6943). While this matter was based on endurance in previous nations, it is among those issues in which Allah legislated leniency for the Muslim Ummah out of His mercy towards them. This is evident in the case of ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, may Allah be pleased with him, when the disbelievers tortured his mother and father and killed them, and they did not release him until he said words of disbelief that they wanted. Regarding him and others like him among the weak, Allah revealed: **“Whoever disbelieves in Allah after their belief—except for someone who is compelled while their heart remains firm in faith—but whoever opens their heart to disbelief, upon them is wrath from Allah, and for them is a great punishment.”** (*Sūrat al-Naḥl: 106*)



impossible for all the chosen creation to uphold faith, obedience, and servitude if they had so willed (which once again affirms the plausibility of Plantinga's fourth world). In this, we find in the authentic ḥadīth from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ his statement: "Every inhabitant of Hell will see their seat in Paradise and will say, 'If only Allah had guided me,' and this becomes a cause of regret for them. And every inhabitant of Paradise will see their seat in Hell and will say, 'If not for Allah's guidance, I would have been there,' and this becomes a cause of gratitude for them."⁽¹⁾

Thus, Allah is absolutely independent of us all; He acts and creates not out of any need or deficiency (exalted is He), but rather by His will, wisdom, and purpose of goodness: **"If Allah were to punish people for their wrongdoings, He would not leave a single living being on the earth, but He gives them respite for an appointed term. And when their term comes, they cannot delay it for an hour, nor can they bring it forward."** (*Sūrat al-Nisā': 147*)

Allah indeed willed goodness for His chosen creation, but some of them rejected it by their own choice, adopting disbelief, stubbornness, and arrogance toward Allah. Thus, they became deserving of the punishment: **"Do they wait for the angels to come to them or for the command of your Lord to come? Thus did those before them. And Allah wronged them not, but they wronged themselves."** (*Sūrat al-Naḥl: 33*)

Why do we say that Allah is the Creator of everything, including evil?

Here lies a fundamental difference between the beliefs of Muslims and those of Christians. While they hesitate to say that Allah created evil, in Islam, we affirm that nothing in the universe—good or evil—exists except by His creation, permission, and will, even if it is through the volition and choice of humans: **"For those who wish to take a path to their Lord, yet you do not will unless Allah wills. Allah is Ever-Knowing, Wise."** (*Sūrat al-Insān: 30*)

There is nothing in existence except Creator or created; there is no third category: **"Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is, over all things, Disposer of affairs."** (*Sūrat al-Zumar: 62*)

The meaning is that had Allah not willed for evil to exist (whether by being created, occurring, or being done by anyone), then it would not have existed, been created, or been possible for anyone to do. This clarifies the matter further: Allah gave the opportunity for evil to manifest not because He is evil—exalted is He—but to reveal the goodness of the righteous and the evil of the wicked, as we explained earlier.

These cannot be demonstrated in the real world and serve as proof unless evil is allowed to manifest, just as there is an opportunity for goodness to occur. The matter is akin (and to Allah belongs the highest example) to a teacher who wants to reveal the ethics of good students and

(1) Narrated by Imām Aḥmad and others, and authenticated by al-Albānī in al-Silsilah al-Ṣaḥīḥah (no. 2034).



bad students practically to hold them accountable. Hence, he allows them to act while observing them. Indeed, the bad students commit wrongdoings that, had the teacher wanted to prevent them, he could have easily done so (for he is stronger than they are and has authority over them). Yet he allowed these wrongdoings to occur to establish proof and evidence against them when he holds them accountable.

This is why our noble Messenger ﷺ says in his well-known supplication: “Here I am at Your service and You have no partner. All goodness is in Your hands, and evil is not attributed to You.”⁽¹⁾

Furthermore, we observe the reverence displayed toward Allah by not attributing illness directly to Him, even though no harm or benefit can occur except by His permission and decree. As stated by the forefather of the prophets, Ibrāhīm, in the Qur’an: “**He who created me, and it is He who guides me. And it is He who feeds me and gives me drink. And when I am ill, it is He who cures me.**” (*Sūrat al-Shu‘arā’*: 78–80)

Here, Ibrāhīm attributed creation, guidance, feeding, and quenching thirst to Allah in a manner befitting His majesty, but attributed illness to himself, even though it is all decreed by Allah, as we have previously explained.

Natural Evil in Islam

In Plantinga’s previous defense, when he attempted to explain the existence of natural evil in the world, he presented a premise and a conclusion.

The premise: This evil is separate from the punishment of nations (i.e., purely natural phenomena).

The conclusion: Since he couldn’t find an explanation from Allah, he attributed it to the actions of evil spirits.

Here arises a question: If these evil spirits (i.e., Satan and his followers) are so powerful—capable of causing catastrophic natural events like earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, and the like, without any divine intervention—why have they not attacked every place on earth inhabited by believers or sites of worship and achieved their ends?

In truth, dismissing the idea that these disasters (destructive natural phenomena) might be among the punishments for individuals, nations, or lands stems from ignorance of Allah’s sovereignty over His creation and His ownership of everything in the world.

Nothing happens except by His wisdom and purpose, even calamities (especially since there’s no human, nation, or land immune from sin or transgression, whether major or minor). As for

(1) Narrated by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (no. 1781).



those in whom corruption has become widespread, why should we be surprised if some harm befalls them as a consequence? Even those who attempt to explain such events in the lands of believers as “good” because they release pressure from within the earth (volcanoes) or balance the environment (earthquakes and hurricanes), we say to them that Allah is capable of causing such relief and balance elsewhere or achieving it without casualties!

This meaning is clearly articulated in the words of Allah: **“And whatever misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned. But He pardons much.”** (*Sūrat al-Shūrā: 30*)

Here, “misfortune” is a general term referring to anything that befalls a human being. In this verse, it signifies harm that affects people.

Final and Efficient Causes

This brings us to the clarification mentioned earlier—how can a natural phenomenon be explained through both religion and science?

From a religious perspective, its ultimate purpose is attributed to Allah’s will (for example, rain falling as mercy, or a volcano erupting as punishment).

From a scientific perspective, it is explained in terms of the natural laws and processes that Allah has embedded within creation. Thus, the former is called the “final cause,” and the latter is the “efficient cause.”

Accordingly, there is no contradiction or conflict in combining both the final and efficient causes in the explanation of a single phenomenon. In fact, we frequently use this combination in our daily lives.

For example, if an employee abruptly leaves work because they received a call about an accident involving their father, and their manager later questions their sudden absence, saying, “How could you leave work at such a critical time?” there are two correct answers. The employee might answer with the final cause: that he left because of his father’s accident. Or, he might answer with the efficient cause: that he took the elevator and then drove to the hospital!

Here, the employee will choose the final cause, understanding that this is what his manager’s question is really about. Likewise, any Muslim asked about a natural phenomenon (whether seen as mercy or punishment) will consider the questioner’s intention and the context—whether the questioner seeks to know the final cause (Allah’s purpose in it) or the efficient cause (how it occurred).



Natural Evil as a Punishment for Humanity

Thus, every calamity that befalls humans is due to what their own hands have earned, even though Allah often withholds punishment, granting respite and so on. As Allah also says: “**No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is inscribed in the Book before We bring it into existence—indeed, that is easy for Allah.**” (*Sūrat al-Ḥadīd: 22*)

And He says: “**Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people’s hands have earned, so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].**” (*Sūrat al-Rūm: 41*)

In the tafsīr of the latter verse, Ibn Kathīr says: “The meaning of Allah’s words: ‘Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people’s hands have earned’ refers to the reduction in crops and fruits due to sins. Abū al-‘Āliyah said: ‘Whoever disobeys Allah upon the earth has caused corruption in it, for the righteousness of the earth and sky is maintained by obedience [to Allah].⁽¹⁾’”

Looking at the Islamic lands where calamities have occurred, any fair-minded and knowledgeable observer will recognize that these were preceded by many open displays of disobedience to Allah, or the legalization of what He has forbidden, and the forbidding of what He has made lawful, or even blatant disrespect of His sacred commands (such as the widespread normalization of fornication to the extent that a father may rent out his daughter to tourists, or when the state remains silent about it and even legalizes it).

The same applies to the widespread open blasphemy, the insults directed at the religion and at Allah and His Messenger, whether by the young or the old among those who identify as Muslims! As for the righteous who denounce falsehood, their reckoning is with Allah if the trial and calamity descend—a trial that will not afflict the wrongdoers alone but will encompass everyone, unfortunately, unless Allah’s mercy intervenes to save the believers among them: “**And fear a trial which will not strike those who have wronged among you exclusively, and know that Allah is severe in punishment.**” (*Sūrat al-Anfāl: 25*)

Here is the earth swallowing, transformation, and the raining of stones tied by the Prophet ﷺ to the spread of sin and its open display, as he says—as reported by al-Tirmidhī: “In this ummah there will be swallowing up of the earth, transformation, and raining of stones. A man among the Muslims said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, when will that be?’ He said, ‘When female singers and musical instruments appear and wine is drunk.’⁽²⁾”

(1) Ibn Kathīr’s Tafsīr, Sūrat al-Rūm, Verse (41).

(2) Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in *Sunan* No. (2212), and it was graded ḥasan (good) by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī*.

A similar narration is found regarding the swallowing of the earth: “People from my nation will drink alcohol, calling it by other names, and musical instruments will be played over their heads; Allah will cause the earth to swallow them and will turn some of them into apes and swine.⁽¹⁾”

Indeed, we find that the companions—who were the most understanding of the prophet’s teachings ﷺ—fully comprehended the relationship between such natural phenomena (or natural evil) and the sins, wrongdoings, and innovations introduced by people into the religion. Here is the account of al-Fārūq ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the close companion of the Prophet and the second caliph of the Muslims, whose opinions were affirmed by the Qur’an in multiple instances even before its revelation. Imām Abū ‘Umar (Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr) reports in his book *al-Istidhkār* a unique incident that occurred during ‘Umar’s caliphate in Madinah: “9844 - Abū ‘Umar said: ‘There is no authentic narration from the Prophet ﷺ indicating that an earthquake (i.e., the phenomenon of an earthquake) occurred during his time, nor was any Sunnah established by him in this regard. It was first recorded during the early period of Islam under the leadership of ‘Umar, who condemned it and said: ‘By Allah, you have innovated (meaning you have introduced a sin that was not present before in the city of the Messenger of Allah). If it happens again, I will leave you and depart from your midst.’

9845 - Narrated by Ibn ‘Uyaynah from ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Umar, from Nāfi’, from Ṣafiyyah, who said: The city of Madinah was shaken during the time of ‘Umar until its walls trembled. He stood, praised Allah, and then said: ‘How quickly you have innovated... By Allah, if it happens again, I will leave you and depart from your midst.’”

The second narration has a sound chain of transmission⁽²⁾.

This incident demonstrates the deep insight of the esteemed companion ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allah be pleased with him) in interpreting such matters. I chose to mention this particular report to highlight an important point: fundamentally, it is not possible to distinguish, in the case of a natural disaster, whether it occurred as a punishment or as a purely random cosmic event—

(1) Narrated by Ibn Mājah in his Sunan under number (3263), where he stated: “...and this narration has supporting evidence from the narrations of ‘Alī, ‘Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Busur, Sahl ibn Sa’d, Anas ibn Mālik, and ‘Ā’ishah from the Prophet ﷺ,” and it was authenticated by al-Albānī in Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah.

(2) ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥaṣṣ ibn ‘Āṣim ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-‘Adawī al-Madanī, Abū ‘Uthmān, was one of the seven prominent jurists (al-fuqahā’ al-sab’ah). Ibn Ḥajar ~ described him in al-Taqrīb as “trustworthy, reliable.” As for Nāfi’, the freedman of Ibn ‘Umar {, Ibn Ḥajar also described him as “trustworthy, reliable, a jurist, well-known.” Ṣafiyyah was the daughter of Abū ‘Ubayd ibn Mas’ūd ibn ‘Amr al-Thaqafī, and the wife of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb }, whom she married during the caliphate of his father, as mentioned in Ṭabaqāt Ibn Sa’d. She narrated from ‘Umar, ‘Ā’ishah, Ḥaṣṣah, Umm Salamah, and others } altogether, as recorded in Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb. Ibn Ḥajar said about her: “al-‘Ajli stated: She was a Medinan, a trustworthy follower (tābi’iyyah).” Ibn Ḥibbān ~ also listed her in al-Thiqāt.



or as an act of immensely powerful evil spirits! That is the default position (for example, those spirits would not leave a signature after the disaster to indicate that it was their doing rather than a punishment from Allah). Thus, it becomes clear that the only method for differentiating, according to Plantinga or others, would be to pre-assume the purity of a certain people or place. In other words, if they were pure and a disaster struck them, it would be deemed a random cosmic event or caused by evil spirits; but if the people of that town were not pure, then the disaster would be viewed as divine punishment (even though the disaster itself, in its details and events, would be the same).

Upon returning to that report about the earthquake in Madinah, we see the comprehensive and profound understanding of ‘Umar al-Fārūq (may Allah be pleased with him) in his view of such disasters—and indeed, of all calamities in general. This is despite the fact that Madinah (the city of the Prophet ﷺ holds a significant status in Islam, as is well known, being home to the Prophet’s mosque and tomb, alongside the grave of his companion Abū Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) and the graves of other Companions.

Thus, Islam and the Qur’an, in numerous instances, affirm that there is no calamity except that it has already been preordained by God before it manifests on Earth. God Almighty says: **“Nothing befalls on the earth or in yourselves but it is inscribed in a Book before We bring it into existence. Surely, that is easy for Allah”** (*al-Ḥadīd: 22*).

If this applies in lands of the believers or Muslims, then it is even more evident in lands of the disbelievers. This is indeed happening, even if the ignorant are unaware of it, or it is not widely reported in our media. There are many earthquakes and hurricanes striking them, but we only hear of a few. Sometimes, hurricanes follow one another in the same country within a single month (such as the hurricanes of Central America, which devastate the Caribbean islands and affect northern Venezuela, eastern Mexico, and southeastern United States)!⁽¹⁾

Thus, trials, tests, and examinations are the secret, essence, and purpose of this life, to reveal the inner states of every soul—whether of goodness or evil, of impatience or patience, and sometimes even to elevate ranks and atone for sins and wrongdoings. This means that even innocent or righteous individuals might be affected amidst the wrongdoers, as we mentioned moments ago.

(1) And perhaps in this year 2017 CE – the time when this book was completed – we have heard and seen on the channels and in the news reports several hurricanes actually following one another in these regions, such as “Hurricane Katia,” “Harvey,” “Irma,” and “Jose.” These have caused devastating losses for some countries, exceeding 300 billion dollars. Hurricane specialists were astonished by the occurrence of three hurricanes simultaneously, as reported in the news at the following link:

<http://www.msn.com/en-us/weather/topstories/hurricane-scientists-have-never-seen-an-image-like-this-before/ar-AArtxSw>



This is the outcome when corruption spreads in a society, unfortunately. This was highlighted by the Mother of the Believers, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (may Allah be pleased with her), the Prophet's wife, when she asked him: "O Messenger of Allah, will we be destroyed while there are righteous among us?" He said, "Yes, if wickedness becomes widespread." This is an authentic, agreed-upon ḥadīth.

As for the wrongdoers, they perished due to their sins in the natural disaster and will be resurrected to be held accountable and punished for their sins. As for the righteous, they were victims of those wrongdoers and what befell them all because of their actions (just like when a corrupt building contractor causes a building to collapse, killing those inside, who were blameless—the contractor's actions revealed his inner corruption, for which God will hold him accountable, and the deaths of those inside are upon his shoulders). God will resurrect everyone according to their intentions. This is illustrated by what the Prophet ﷺ mentioned in the ḥadīth of the army heading towards the Ka'bah in the end times and the swallowing up of the earth that destroys them en route. When the Prophet ﷺ was asked about those who are on the road but bear no blame, he responded as reported in both Ṣaḥīḥayn from 'Ā'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her): "...We said: O Messenger of Allah, the road may gather people of different kinds? He said: Yes, among them will be those seeking help, the insane, and travelers. They will all perish together, but they will be resurrected according to their intentions."

In al-Bukhārī's version, she said: "I said: O Messenger of Allah, how will the first and last of them be swallowed up, while among them are their markets and those not of their kind? He said: They will be swallowed up together, then resurrected according to their intentions."

So once again...

The Islamic perspective on what is called "natural evil" is not separate from the view of trials and tests that Allah has decreed by His wisdom throughout life. Many Islamic scholars have pointed out in their explanations of the Qur'an and their advice to the Muslim community how believers should reflect and take heed from such disasters and calamities of varying degrees and types.

They should remember Allah's power to bring punishment and harm if He wills, due to our sins. And indeed, it is rare for a year to pass without humanity experiencing such warning messages. Allah says about the disbelievers and their unfortunate lack of reflection: **"Do they not see that they are tried once or twice every year? Yet they neither repent nor take heed."** (*Sūrat al-Tawbah: 126*)

In Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* of the verse, **"And nothing has prevented Us from sending signs except that the former peoples denied them"** (*Sūrat al-Isrā': 59*), it is narrated from Qatādah: "Indeed, Allah warns people with whatever signs He wills so that they may reflect, take heed, or return (to Him).



It is mentioned to us that Kufa trembled during the time of Ibn Mas‘ūd, and he said: ‘O people! Your Lord is seeking atonement from you, so make amends.’”

Thus, just as it is prescribed to make supplication for Muslims during drought (seeking rain), it is also prescribed to make supplication against disbelievers who fight against Muslims, asking for drought and similar hardships. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the Prophet ﷺ prayed: “O Allah, rescue the weak among the believers. O Allah, intensify Your grip on Muḍar (a tribe), O Allah, make its years like those of Yūsuf.”

Meaning, like the seven years of drought that struck the people of Egypt. Just as the answer to prayers for rain comes through physical causes, drought and famine come about through physical causes as well.

Examples from the Qur’an and Sunnah

From the Qur’an:

- Allah connects obedience and disobedience to the blessings or hardships of nature: **“Allah sets forth the example of a city that was secure and at ease, its provisions coming to it in abundance from every place, but it denied Allah’s blessings, so Allah made it taste the garb of hunger and fear because of what they used to do.”** (*Sūrat al-Naḥl*: 112)
- He also says: **“If they had remained on the right path, We would certainly have provided them with abundant water.”** (*Sūrat al-Jinn*: 16)
- And likewise: **“If only the people of the towns had believed and feared Allah, We would have opened upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth. But they denied, so We seized them for what they used to do.”** (*Sūrat al-A‘rāf*: 96)
- Regarding Prophet Nūḥ’s advice to his people: **“He said: ‘Ask forgiveness from your Lord, for indeed He is ever Forgiving. He will send rain upon you in abundance and give you increase in wealth and children and provide for you gardens and provide for you rivers.’”** (*Sūrat Nūḥ*: 10-12)

As for the Sunnah:

Let us suffice with one narration in addition to what we mentioned earlier about supplications for drought and years like those of Yusuf (may peace be upon him) as a result of the disbelievers’ hostility towards Muslims. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, as narrated by Ibn Mājah in his *Sunan* and graded as ḥasan by al-Albānī: “O Muhājirīn, there are five things with which you will be tested – and I seek refuge with Allah lest you experience them:

- No people ever indulge in immoral behavior (such as fornication, sexual deviance, and the like) openly without being afflicted by plagues and diseases that were unknown to their forebears.



- And no people ever cheat in weights and measures except that they will be afflicted by droughts (lack of rain), hardship (such as poverty and crop failure), and the tyranny of their rulers.
- And no people ever withhold the zakāt of their wealth except that rain will be withheld from the sky, and were it not for the animals, they would not be given rain at all.
- And no people ever break the covenant of Allah and His Messenger except that Allah will empower an enemy over them from outside their own ranks who will seize some of what is in their hands.
- And as long as their leaders do not rule by the Book of Allah and do not seek from what Allah has revealed, Allah will make their might turn against each other (i.e., civil strife and infighting).”

What about animals?

Many objectors to the existence of evil use the suffering of animals as an unanswerable example to challenge the mercy and justice of Allah. They ask questions like: “What crime did a gentle gazelle commit if it falls between two rocks and remains trapped until it dies of hunger or thirst?” and other similar examples designed to elicit the listener’s sympathy and turn them against faith.

The truth is that the suffering experienced by animals is not disconnected from the effects of human sins as well. Here, we are specifically discussing incidents of slow or painful death, such as that of the aforementioned gazelle. Otherwise, animals hunt and prey on one another every day and every hour, and no rational person objects to this. Likewise, humans regularly slaughter animals for food, but all of this occurs within the context of instantaneous or swift killing (and here we speak of proper Islamic slaughtering, not the methods invented by self-proclaimed advocates of animal rights, who ironically cause more suffering).

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah be merciful to him) compiled several statements from the companions and early scholars on this issue in his book *al-Jawāb al-Kāfi*. Among these are:

- The statement of Abū Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him): “The houbara bird (a species of bird) dies in its nest due to the injustice of the oppressor.”
- The statement of Mujāhid (may Allah be merciful to him): “The animals curse the disobedient children of Ādam when the drought intensifies and rain is withheld, saying: ‘This is because of the sins of the children of Ādam.’”
- The statement of ‘Ikrimah (may Allah be merciful to him) as well: “The earth’s creatures, even the beetles and scorpions, say: ‘We were denied rain because of the sins of the children of Ādam.’”

This reflects one aspect of understanding the narration reported by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and others, where the Messenger of Allah ﷺ passed by a funeral and said: “At rest or bringing rest.”



They asked: “O Messenger of Allah, what do you mean by ‘at rest or bringing rest’?”

He said: “The believing servant is at rest from the fatigue and harm of this world to the mercy of Allah, while the wicked servant brings rest to the people, the land, the trees, and the animals.”

The meaning here could be the direct harm inflicted by the wicked upon others, the land, trees, and animals, or the indirect harm caused by the drought, barrenness, and similar calamities we have mentioned.

Thus...

When an atheist or skeptic brings up the suffering of animals as a challenge to belief by citing their pain and suffering, simply say to them: How do you know that your disbelief and atheism are not themselves contributing to the suffering of these animals?

What is astonishing...

Is that from Allah’s guidance to animals, He made the limit of their predation to be for sustenance, not for sport or cruelty. Animals do not kill outside their own species except to feed themselves and sustain life. Likewise, Islam commands us not to kill animals for sport, play, or amusement but solely for the purpose of slaughter and food (and we will review some related hadiths in the second chapter of the book).

Indeed, we observe wondrous examples of this, even among predatory animals with a level of awareness of pain or those with moist livers (a term indicating a living, breathing creature). In a famous clip from a wildlife documentary, a female leopard kills a female baboon, only to discover the baboon’s infant clinging to her as she drags her prey. In that moment, the leopard stops, leaves her prey, and begins caring for the infant, staying by its side to protect it day and night⁽¹⁾.

The point being (for such instances are indeed numerous) is that even in the animal world, there are mercies that Allah has placed within it, despite the fact that animals are not accountable to any message or prophet.

Our noble Prophet ﷺ, said in the hadith recorded by al-Bukhārī and Muslim: “Allah made mercy into one hundred parts; He kept ninety-nine parts with Himself and sent down to earth one part, and from that one part, all creatures show mercy to one another, to the extent that a mare lifts her hoof away from her foal for fear of hurting it.”

Despite this, Allah created animals to eat and be eaten, to serve humanity, and to maintain balance and continuity of life on earth. He created them without promising them Paradise or Hell, so we cannot question Him about their pain or suffering in this life. Rather, they will turn into

(1) The video can be watched here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8d6b3Rlfj-4



dust in the Hereafter (and it is then that the disbeliever will say, “Oh, I wish I were dust!”). Allah is more knowledgeable and more merciful to them than we are. It suffices to mention His justice, as it is narrated in a hadith by Imam Ahmad, authenticated by Al-Albānī and others: “Creation will settle accounts with each other (on the Day of Judgment), even the hornless animal will settle with the horned one (which attacked it), and even the tiniest ant will settle with another ant (this is a metaphor indicating that even the smallest of creatures will have justice done for them).”

This concludes this chapter.

And now...

Let us begin reviewing some beneficial perspectives from other thinkers apart from Plantinga, to see what insights they offer that we might benefit from.



(4) C.S. Lewis's Arguments

There's no doubt that the extensive ground we've covered so far in exploring Alvin Plantinga's ideas and the Islamic perspective will make it much easier for us to filter what's relevant from C.S. Lewis's and William Lane Craig's ideas. In particular, we'll exclude repetitive arguments to avoid redundancy.

Therefore, we'll focus solely on what's unique to each, excluding Christian or apologetic arguments aimed at justifying evil through theology—especially those C.S. Lewis depended on, given that he preceded Alvin Plantinga by several decades (thus, he didn't have access to Plantinga's arguments, which would have spared him from relying so heavily on defenses related to atonement, original sin, crucifixion, and the supposed suffering of the divine through sacrificing his only son, as they claim).

The Problem of Evil and the Death of Loved Ones

Let's begin with an excerpt highlighting the profound psychological or emotional weight of personal calamities when faith is absent and life's wisdom is lacking. Recall the words we quoted in the introduction from the atheist physicist and Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg, about how deeply he was affected by his mother's cancer and death, his father's Alzheimer's, which destroyed his life, and the deaths of his second and third cousins in the Holocaust.

Well, C.S. Lewis himself was no different—as we've previously explained—nor was a third figure whose story we'll now delve into: Philip Vander Elst, a free writer and lecturer who spent 30 years in the fields of politics and journalism.

Philip Vander Elst wrote about his journey from atheism to faith in a work titled *From Atheism to Christianity: A Personal Journey*, where he described how he was influenced by C.S. Lewis's apologetic arguments against the problem of evil, in particular. Here are excerpts from his writing: "I am a free writer and lecturer, and ever since I graduated from Oxford University in 1973 with a degree in politics and philosophy, I've been working in politics and journalism for



most of my time. I have always been fascinated by the world of books, ideas, and debates, and I've often pondered two specific questions that I've sought answers to: Does God exist? And if so, what is the relationship between Allah and freedom?

I was born and raised in a non-Christian family. Although it was a talented family, my parents were not believers. I used to think that scientific progress had refuted the idea of faith in God and the supernatural, and that such faith was incompatible with the concept of freedom. Religious belief, to me, seemed like blind submission to a dictator ruling the universe and a surrender of reason in favor of 'revelation.'...

In any case, I wondered: Should I take religion seriously? And how could I do that when I saw the world suffering under the weight of evil and pain, which seemed to strip Christianity of its credibility in claiming that the world was created by a benevolent and loving God?

My doubts grew, and my hostility to Christianity deepened, influenced by the writings of Ayn Rand and Bertrand Russell. That was my mindset during my time at Oxford. But when I was twenty-four, I met my future wife, and to my astonishment, I discovered she was a believer. How could someone so beautiful and intelligent be one of those believers? That's when I decided to search for strong evidence of Allah's existence and the credibility of faith. Although I was clear from the beginning that I wasn't just seeking answers to strengthen my relationship with my girlfriend."

I began reading C.S. Lewis—the author whose *Chronicles of Narnia* had enchanted me during my childhood—for three reasons:

- The first reason was that this author had once been an atheist himself, and perhaps for that reason, he might be able to answer my questions and doubts.
- The second reason was that I respected Lewis's intellect. He graduated from Oxford University with First-Class Honors in Classics, Philosophy, and English, and became one of the greatest British academics of his generation. If he had succeeded in his journey from skepticism to faith, then perhaps I was mistaken in my belief that faith in Allah required the abandonment of reason.
- The third reason that motivated me to read his works was that, when it came to the problem of pain, no one could accuse him of being superficial or shallow in his thinking, as he lost his mother when he was only ten years old, had a miserable experience at school, and witnessed the horrors of trench warfare during World War I. Additionally, he was deeply conscious of the problem of evil.

Through his writings on these issues, my mind was enlightened, and I was not disappointed. I began reading his three most important books: *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, and finally, *The*



Problem of Pain. At that point, I realized I had not merely followed a person struggling with the dilemmas that troubled me, but I had also found rational and convincing answers to all the doubts that had haunted me.

C.S. Lewis Sheds Light on the Problem of Evil

When my father died when I was seventeen years old, I found that what Lewis wrote about the problem of evil, in particular, echoed what was in my heart and answered my questions. He rightly pointed out that we cannot complain about the existence of evil and suffering and use this as a pretext to doubt the existence of God and His goodness unless we are certain that we are using an objective standard to judge this world and condemn it. Our view of justice must be realistic before we justify our anger and resentment over the evil and suffering we see around us. Otherwise, how do we explain that moral compass or inner code we sense within us?

According to the atheistic view, the human race and its thinking are merely accidental by-products of random movements of particles in a chance universe that has no purpose. In such a case, how can we understand the truth and meaning of our thoughts and feelings, including our sense of justice? This claim has no validity or significance and is nothing more than an empty noise, like the wind rustling through trees.

On the other hand, if we reject this conclusion and insist, for example, that it is an objective and necessary truth that we should love our neighbor and not mistreat children, then we are moving away from atheism. Our inner sense of the existence of an objective moral law written on the pages of our hearts points to the existence of an eternal, benevolent mind, our Creator and the Creator of the universe, who granted us the capacity to think and who is the source of the best and deepest values within us.

In other words, Lewis believed that atheism had effectively undermined and destroyed itself philosophically, because it assaults human reason, including with this argument: if the whole universe were meaningless, then we would never have known it was meaningless. For instance, if there were a universe with no light and creatures without eyes, they would never have known anything about darkness. The word “darkness” itself would have no meaning...⁽¹⁾ Once we acknowledge that there is God, we can make sense of human existence, the world we live in, and the problem of evil.”

Where does the atheist get the ability to distinguish between good and evil?

The final point mentioned by Philip Vander, in quoting C.S. Lewis, is indeed a profound one. C.S. Lewis had previously described how his reason for atheism and rejection of the idea of God’s

(1) C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; Harper Collins: 2001) 38-39.



existence was the harshness of life. However, he later realized that the very issue of his sense of evil itself—his sense and distinction between evil and good—was an even greater problem for him than his new atheism! When he reflected on the matter rationally and logically, he found that his mere sense and discernment of pain formed an argument in favor of proving Allah’s existence rather than an argument against it!

Here’s the full passage where Philip Vander cited this last quote from Lewis, who said: “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I gotten this idea of ‘cruel’ and ‘unjust’? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. So, what was I comparing this universe to when I called it unjust?

If the whole show was bad and meaningless from A to Z—if I may put it that way—why should I, who was supposed to be part of this show, find myself in violent reaction against it? A man feels wet when he falls into water because he is not a water animal; a fish would not feel wet.

I could, of course, have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against Allah collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. Thus, in the very act of trying to prove that Allah did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely, my idea of justice—was full of sense.

Consequently, atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning. For instance, if there were a universe without light and creatures with no eyes, they would never know it was dark. Darkness would be without meaning.⁽¹⁾”

The Problem of Evil is an Argument for the Believers

From the above, it becomes clear that when the atheist raises the problem of evil to embarrass the believer in any dialogue or debate by stirring emotions against Allah, it is actually an unparalleled opportunity to embarrass the atheist and his materialistic approach to life. This is often something he neither expects nor is prepared to respond to, because he generally expects a desperate defense from the believer to convince the audience or viewers about Allah’s beauty, majesty, mercy, justice, wisdom, and so on. He never expects the believer to calmly turn the tables and use the same atheist argument against him.

This is precisely what I have been doing personally in recent years, and I have consistently achieved great success. Either the atheist is struck dumb and unable to respond, causing the

(1) Ibid.



conversation to shift to other topics, or he begins to resort to clear evasion (which in itself is a victory, as his evasion becomes obvious to others), or he starts resorting to insults and slurs, which hastens the end of the debate or dialogue to avoid further embarrassment (as one of the conditions of the dialogue or debate is no insults or slurs, so he resorts to them to forcibly end it).

The matter is simple and easy, with the following steps for anyone who wants to understand:

First: The atheist begins by listing a few or many of the world's miseries and life's sufferings—millions of people's hardships, diseases, animals' pain, etc.—in a familiar and well-known emotional manner to sway the audience or viewers, accusing Allah of injustice and cruelty if He exists.

Second: The believer avoids falling into this trap and focuses on one thing only: Where do you, the atheist, get the distinction between injustice and justice? Between good and evil?

Third: The atheist (if he realizes the real trap he is about to fall into) will try to evade this by accusing the believer of dodging the question.

Fourth: The believer insists that he is not dodging but does not want to skip illogical details without addressing them. As they say in argumentation and debate: "First establish the foundation, then build upon it." It is not correct to proceed with something that is fundamentally flawed. The question is: Where do you, as an atheist, originally get the distinction between injustice and justice? Between good and evil?

As a believer, I see everything in the universe as part of God's wisdom and goodness, while you see evil with no explanation. Now, how do you expect me to defend an evil that has no explanation if you yourself are incapable of explaining its existence? It's like someone asking me: Why does Santa Claus's sleigh get pulled by reindeer instead of dogs? When neither he nor I believe in Santa Claus! Similarly, here: I do not believe in an unexplained evil's existence, and before I answer your question, I want to confirm its existence in your view so we don't waste time discussing something that doesn't exist for me!

So, back to the question: What proof do you have of evil's existence in any form (whether it has an explanation or not)? How did you distinguish it from good? From injustice and justice? Even from right and wrong?

Fifth: The atheist struggles to come up with any argument, no matter how flimsy, and might resort to theatrics to save face, saying something like: "This is clear evasion from you. You can't defend your god, so you resort to these distractions."

Sixth: Here, the believer draws the curtain on this entire segment by exposing the atheist (if he doesn't know) and clarifying to the audience or viewers as well: Why can't the atheist answer?



He says: The one evading here is you. I can defend the wisdom of Allah and the teachings of the religion regarding the existence of evil in the world, but I wanted to show you and everyone that your very question destroys your atheism from its foundation. Here's why:

Atheism is built on a materialistic worldview. No soul, no purpose, no goal, no reward, no punishment after death... Atheism views humans and animals just like any other inanimate object around us and in the universe: nothing but material atoms interacting, assembling, and disassembling without any purpose, meaning, or value... If we want to talk more about atoms, we'd say: they follow set laws, inevitable reactions that occur when conditions are met. For example, an acid + a base will always, under the same conditions, produce salt + water (like hydrochloric acid + sodium hydroxide gives sodium chloride + water).

Here's the strange part: you can't describe one reaction as right and another as wrong! Any interaction between atoms, if it occurs, happens by necessity, so that nothing contradicts. No atoms will apologize for reacting today... or say that they don't like the other atoms and will not react with them. Rather, all atoms react inevitably if their reaction conditions are met, and no matter how many billions of billions of times these conditions are repeated, the reaction's result and direction will never change.

The question: If everything in the universe (according to atheistic materialism) operates this way, where did the concept of injustice or justice come from? Of right or wrong? Of good or evil?

How can we describe an act or reaction as moral or immoral?

How do we even explain the existence of free will itself, which the atheist wants to use to hold people accountable for their choices?

Thus...

Simply raising such questions by an atheist collapses his atheism instantly and automatically. There can be no meaning to everything we mentioned now unless these meanings are planted in us by nature... Planted in us by a higher and greater existence that alone grants meaning and the distinction between good and evil: **"By the soul and the One who proportioned it, and inspired it with discernment of its wickedness and its righteousness."** (*Sūrat ash-Shams: 7-9*)

For if the whole universe were good, we wouldn't know what evil means. And if the whole universe were evil, we wouldn't know what good means (like C.S. Lewis's example of the straight and crooked lines, and humans vs. fish). So, where does the atheist get his reference point to judge believers?

Here, the atheist will fall silent... and will not be able to respond.



(5) William Lane Craig

William Lane Craig shares with Alvin Plantinga a specialization in analytic philosophy, which is known for the logical arrangement of arguments or responses in sequential points. However, William Lane Craig shows signs of being influenced by Islamic thought in some of his ideas. He adopted Plantinga's concept of free will defense to explain the problem of evil philosophically and to demonstrate that the existence of a perfect religious deity is not incompatible with the existence of evil.

But there is another common point between them that we did not highlight when discussing Alvin Plantinga, which we preferred to delay until this moment: it is the skill in refuting the materialistic methodology, not only by showing its voidness in the area of good and evil and morality (and William Lane Craig has debates on this, one of the most famous being his debate with the atheist Sam Harris), but also by skillfully using the acknowledgments and necessary implications of the materialistic methodology itself regarding random evolutionary development to show how, if evolution is true, the default state of the world is evil, and any attempt to claim a different meaning (i.e., good) contradicts that material foundation!

Materialism and evolution generalize evil

To understand William Lane Craig's position here, it is based on a clear idea demonstrated by Alvin Plantinga⁽¹⁾, which is:

The atheistic objection to the existence of evil in the world relies on a prior assumption by the atheist that humans should not suffer, be rejected, or die from hunger or injustice. But the shocking part here (for the atheist, of course) is that the very mechanism of natural selection itself—the evolutionary mechanism—relies fundamentally on killing, annihilation, and violence by the strong against the weak! In fact, this is considered entirely natural according to the

(1) Alvin Plantinga, «A Christian Life Party Lived,» *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (IVP, 1993), p. 73.



materialistic, evolutionary methodology of atheism. And here lies the paradox and the question: On what basis does the atheist judge reality in our natural world as unjust, unfair, or something that should not be?

The atheist's judgment here can only be interpreted as a recourse to something (or some source) non-natural (or supernatural, or beyond nature) from which to draw such an objection against nature!

His objection to the existence of evil is, in itself, a rebellion against the very nature that (supposedly) he belongs to and knows only its outcomes (which do not promote anything but evil, injustice, and suffering as mechanisms for evolution or natural selection)!

The atheist cannot demand justice in the face of injustice, for example, unless he already has a source that imposes on creatures how they should live and against which he measures. And from here, there is no atheistic or irreligious methodology or thought that contains such a prior obligation or imposition. Where there is no Creator, there is no “do this” or “don’t do that.”

Everything becomes relative, depending on each individual's need to ensure survival, even at the expense of injustice or the destruction of others (and this is another critique of how altruistic ethics and self-sacrifice could emerge from the womb of evolution, but that is not our focus here).

William Lane Craig's Perspective on the Problem of Evil

Returning to William Lane Craig, we find that he spoke at length about the problem of evil, and the most important points from his discussion can be summarized as follows:

The article addresses both the logical argument (which claims that the existence of evil is incompatible with the existence of a perfect religious deity) and the probabilistic argument (which atheists devised after the logical argument failed, claiming that the abundance of unjustified evil undermines the existence of a perfect deity), just as we discussed in relation to Alvin Plantinga.

William Lane Craig divided the response to the problem of evil into two categories: an intellectual response (which includes the two aforementioned philosophical arguments and shows how a perfect deity can coexist with evil) and an emotional response (which addresses the emotional objections believers may have regarding the existence of pain and suffering under the watch of the deity).

Here, we will focus only on the intellectual responses of William Lane Craig and avoid the emotional ones, as they are all rooted in distorted Christian theology (like C.S. Lewis) with its claims of a suffering deity (and it is well known psychologically that when a person sees someone else suffering as much as or more than themselves, it can lessen their own distress—a method



they used here), despite the disagreement of many theologians about whether this supposed divine suffering is real or metaphorical.

William Lane Craig also acknowledges that the logical argument of the problem of evil has been resolved by philosophers (likely referring to Alvin Plantinga and the agreement of many on his victory), as it clearly demonstrated how a logical reason could exist for the Creator allowing evil to exist (free will), without undermining His goodness, knowledge, power, or complete divinity (as in religions). Craig then states that the real focus now should be the probabilistic argument concerning the extent of evil—especially unjustified evil—which they argue undermines the existence of such a deity. From this point, he tried to summarize the response as follows:

First: It is known that human intellect and capabilities are limited, so how can a limited creature like a human fully grasp the wisdom, purpose, or intent of Allah in permitting evil in the form it takes?

Craig provided an analogy: while most people struggle to comprehend the minor effect of a butterfly flapping its wings, according to chaos theory, these flaps on a tree branch in West Africa could, through a chain of amplified effects, eventually cause a hurricane in the Atlantic Ocean!

Thus, we are not in a position to judge the events of the world. The brutal killing of an innocent man or the death of a child from leukemia may result in significant outcomes years or even centuries later, perhaps in other parts of the world. This is the complexity of life in light of our limited capacities.

Second: There are certain faith-based doctrines that support the coexistence of such evils in the world with the existence of a perfect deity. Among these beliefs are, for example:

1. The belief that the primary purpose of this world is not for us to live in happiness. We are not here as Allah's pampered pets, but rather, the purpose is the knowledge of Allah. Through this knowledge, humans can reach their perfection in the afterlife. Thus, much of the "unjustified" evil in this life is only incompatible with those who view life as being for happiness, but it aligns with those who view it as a means for knowing Allah. Suffering increases their attachment to Him and strengthens their patience and trust in Him, whether it is the sufferer himself or those around him. This highlights the difference between them and those who respond with anger and resentment toward Allah.
2. The anger of some people toward Allah and His purpose in allowing evil to manifest leads them to distance themselves from Him and indulge in sins, disobedience, and disbelief. This results in the human evil they blame, while the evil arises from their distancing from Allah. Thus, the Creator does not intervene to completely prevent evil from appearing but allows it



so that people's moral responsibility before their Creator increases, and they recognize their need for forgiveness and repentance.

3. No matter how much suffering and pain there is in this world, it is nothing compared to what Allah has prepared for the believers in the Hereafter; therefore, any comparison is invalid, regardless of how great the evil in this world might seem⁽¹⁾, and it does not diminish Allah's perfection.
4. Knowing Allah is the highest blessing a human being can attain, and to highlight those whose hearts have been filled with that blessing, the existence of evil and suffering in the world proves that, no matter what they endure, their love and reverence for Allah remain unchanged. This serves as a practical demonstration of the supremacy of love and reverence for Allah above all else.

Thirdly: Considering the overall scope of evidence and probabilities, the existence of a perfect religious deity is more probable. Let's illustrate this with an example: suppose that Joe is a student at the University of Colorado, and we are informed that 95% of the students at the university ski. Here, the probability of Joe skiing is high. But what if we also learn that Joe is a double amputee, and 95% of amputees at the University of Colorado do not ski? Here, the probability of Joe skiing drops dramatically. Likewise, when discussing the existence of a perfect religious deity: if you look at it from only one angle—as the atheist prefers—namely the presence of unjustified evil in their view, the probability seems small. However, if this is combined with other bodies of evidence—namely, evidence for the existence of Allah—the matter changes; thus, what matters is looking at the cumulative evidence, some of which can be mentioned as follows:

1. The existence of Allah is the only explanation for the question: Why is there something rather than nothing? Scientists' statements over the past eighty years have favored the Big Bang theory, which posits that the universe appeared from nothing. Here, a rational and logical pause is necessary: why did the universe appear precisely at that time, around 13.5 billion years ago? This is embarrassing for atheists and agnostics, whose responses have been notably weak. The atheist philosopher Quentin Smith admitted this, quoting Anthony Kenny, who said: "A proponent of the Big Bang theory, if he is an atheist, must believe that the material of the universe came from nothing but by something!"

2. Furthermore, the existence of Allah is the best explanation for the fine-tuning of the universe through the constants of physical laws discovered over the past forty years. This has made the

(1) This reminds us of the saying of the Prophet ﷺ in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim when he said in its second part: "... And the most miserable person in this world from the people of Paradise will be dipped once in Paradise, and it will be said to him: O son of Adam, have you ever seen any misery? Have you ever experienced hardship? He will say: No, by Allah, my Lord, I have never experienced any misery, and I have never seen any hardship!"



probability of a universe capable of supporting life on Earth extremely slim and unimaginable to have occurred by chance or randomness. We're talking here about values like gravitational force or the weak nuclear force—if they changed by as little as one part in 10 raised to the power of 100 (that is, a one followed by 100 zeros)⁽¹⁾, the universe would not allow for life.

For instance, the cosmological constant (Lambda λ), or the cosmological constant itself, if altered by just one part in 10 raised to the power of 120, the universe would not have expanded in the manner it did. The renowned physicist from the University of Oxford, Roger Penrose, attempted to calculate the probabilities of random cosmic laws that would ultimately allow life on Earth, finding it to be as precise as 10 raised to the power of 10 raised to the power of 123—a probability and precision so astonishing that he himself (despite being non-religious) commented: “I cannot recall anything in physics whose precision even remotely approaches one in $10^{10^{123}}$,” and he also said: “There are many values and constants that must be finely tuned for life to exist in the universe.

Moreover, it's not just about tuning one of them individually, but their relationships and ratios to one another must also be carefully adjusted, which gives a product of probability numbers multiplied by more probability numbers multiplied by more probability numbers until our minds stagger at the impossible numbers.” He concluded that the signs have become clearer and clearer against chance and randomness, stating: “Through my scientific work, I have come to believe more and more strongly that the physical universe has been put together with such incredible finesse that I cannot accept it as merely a blind fact.”

Likewise, the renowned non-religious astronomer and mathematician Fred Hoyle said: “A commonsense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics.”

All of the above can be formulated more clearly, without evasion or irreligious stubbornness, as Robert Jastrow—former head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies—described it: the strongest evidence for the existence of God that can be extracted from science.

3. The final example among the proofs for the necessity of God's existence here is the presence of objective moral values in the world.

Without God—as a single and fixed reference point—no one could prove the superiority of any moral virtue or the repulsiveness of any crime by a purely material standard. Rape, for instance,

(1) In mathematics, if we want to express the multiplication of a number by itself multiple times (for example: $10 \times 10 \times 10$), we can write it more concisely in the form of a base (which is 10 here) raised to an exponent (which is 3 times), and it is written as: 10^3 .



might be seen as heinous by some socially, but could be deemed acceptable by others based on their needs and their outlook on life's necessities.

The atheist philosopher of biological sciences, Michael Ruse, admits that—according to the materialist and atheistic view—morality is nothing more than an adaptation for survival, just like a hand or a foot that evolved and adapted. He says that to ascribe any deeper meaning to morality is nothing but an illusion.

Likewise, the most famous atheist of the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche, after announcing the age of atheistic communism with his declaration of the “death of God,” understood by that the death of any objective meaning or value in life. For without a single, stable reference point, there remains no basis for moral judgment.

Here, William Lane Craig distances himself from the common atheist questions, such as: “Are you saying one must believe in God to live a moral life?” or “Can someone believe in objective moral values without being a believer in God?”

Rather, he clarifies that the real question he wants to focus on is this: If God does not exist, would objective moral values exist at all?

To envision the answer, let us consider the atheist's view of the human being—the one who is supposed to judge an action as good or evil. In the materialist atheist worldview, the human is no more than a by-product of random natural processes, like any inanimate object, plant, or animal. He holds no objective or absolute meaning. He is but dust on a planet that itself has no weight in the vast dust of the cosmos and will vanish—sooner or later—whether as an individual or a species.

Is this the one who will make moral judgments of objective or absolute value? Based on what fixed principle or reference would such objectivity be grounded?

Here lies the paradox: all of us *internally* feel that objective moral values do exist⁽¹⁾. And thus, the very sensation of evil and the ability to distinguish it is itself proof of the necessity of God's existence.

These are just a few accessible arguments, while the distinguished philosopher Alvin Plantinga, for example, collected a dozen or more arguments and proofs for the existence of God. This cumulative force of evidence—as we noted earlier—makes the probability of God's existence outweigh any individual counterargument.

(1) We can prove the existence of certain universally agreed-upon moral values by asking the atheist about actions such as lying to him, killing him, stealing from him, or betraying him—i.e., moral actions that cause direct harm to him and are instinctively rejected by every human being. At that moment, he will speak the truth.



Thus, we see and can confidently judge that the intellectual version of the problem of evil has failed in disproving the existence of God.

We have now reached the end of the first section

But before we leave it, I would like to close with a statement from William Lane Craig⁽¹⁾. It is not a formal argument or proof in itself, but rather an emotional reflection that reveals to us the nature of evil when it is allowed to surface, stripped of human decency, falling even lower than animals: “...If God does not exist and there is no immortality, then all the horrific acts of evil committed by humans will go unpunished, and all the sacrifices made by good people will go unrewarded. Who can live with such a thought?”

Richard Wurmbrand, who was tortured in communist prisons for his faith, said: “It is hard to imagine the cruelty that atheism leads to when a human being has no belief in reward for good deeds or punishment for evil. At that point, there is no reason to remain human. There is no barrier left to the depths of evil a person can reach.

The communists who tortured us often said: ‘There is no God—neither now nor after death—no punishment for evil. We can do whatever we want.’

I even heard one torturer say: ‘I thank God—whom I do not believe in—that I lived to see this hour in which I can express all the evil in my heart!’”

And he showed this with unimaginable brutality in his torture of the prisoners.

Would you like me to continue with the next section or help extract key points for teaching or publication?

(1) <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-absurdity-of-life-without-god>



Chapter Two: Missing Foundations

Missing Foundations...

As mentioned in the introduction to this book, most of the current efforts dealing with atheism in the Arab and Islamic world have focused primarily on Muslims who are already weak in faith or lack foundational knowledge of Islamic teachings. In fact, one could say that many of them know the Qur'an, the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, or Islamic rulings no better than a distant foreigner or even a Christian might know them.

This is why I pointed out that the time has come to consider another parallel and serious issue: that of some devout Muslims—or those who once were—who ended up falling into the trap of doubts, questioning the existence of Allah, disbelief, or even outright atheism, particularly due to the problem of evil. I describe this issue as serious for the following reasons:

- **First:** It points to the weakness of the religious foundation upon which we raise our children. If someone considered religious can fall like this, it is a red flag for scholars, preachers, educators, and families regarding how we build religious understanding.
- **Second:** The negative impact that occurs when the public hears about someone who was once seen as religious abandoning their faith. For many, such a person is a role model—someone seen as embodying the peak of religious commitment and spiritual fulfillment. So what does it say if the “fruit” of faith turns out to be deviation or atheism?

When analyzing why such individuals turn away from faith or embrace atheism, we find that it is rarely due to a single reason. More often, it's a combination of interwoven factors that build up over time, sometimes since childhood, until a triggering moment leads to a full break—manifested as deviation or disbelief.



Such factors might include family issues like the loss of one or both parents, divorce or separation, harsh upbringing, corrupt or abusive parents or spouses, or the shattering of idealistic fantasies about a world free from evil, when faced with the painful realities of suffering and tragedy, either personally or witnessed through media.

Therefore...

This second chapter of the book will focus on reviewing the most common issues I've encountered in my interactions with young people who were once committed but later began doubting. These cases, unfortunately, highlight a wide range of missing foundations that are often overlooked in how we teach our children religious commitment and Qur'an memorization.

It should be noted that many of the "committed" individuals I refer to here were only outwardly religious, according to their own understanding. Most of them did not absorb religious commitment through proper knowledge, deep understanding, or genuine love of Allah. For them, it was more akin to imitation: emulating those they admired—be it authors they read, speakers they heard, or religious peers they looked up to⁽¹⁾. This explains why some of the issues I will mention may seem surprisingly trivial for someone presumed to be a committed Muslim.

(1) Therefore, I will not dedicate a separate section to the issue of lacking Islamic knowledge, although it will be evident in most of the issues I will mention, Allah willing. For some, the mere lack of knowledge is enough to cause doubt—while a deep and broad understanding of religious knowledge repels most doubts and their related issues.



1. Lack of Religious Knowledge

Undoubtedly, ignorance is the root of all calamities in both religion and worldly matters. While not all the “devout” individuals discussed here are entirely ignorant of religion, the majority are. Based on hundreds of cases I’ve encountered, I estimate this to be about 95%. This significant proportion of religiously ignorant individuals often adhere outwardly based on their personal understanding and perspective of Islam.

Some perceive commitment solely in terms of attire, such as the beard or niqab. Others associate it with memorizing the Qur’an, Hadiths, and certain texts. Yet others equate it with specific behaviors and etiquettes prescribed or proscribed by Islam. While all these are commendable (and they are among the closest to being preachers through their words, actions, and everyday conduct), their lack of religious knowledge unfortunately makes them susceptible to certain doubts that can destabilize or instill skepticism if not addressed by consulting knowledgeable scholars, whether these doubts are scientific, psychological, or emotional, as will be seen shortly.

Example of a Scientific Doubt

A young man, a Qur’an memorizer and regular attendee of mosque prayers, was unaware of the details regarding the compilation of the Qur’an, its various readings, and some of their differences. This made him an easy target for doubts challenging the preservation and transmission of the Qur’an from this angle. My role was to explain this point until he understood it, praise be to God.

This is an example of a doubt rooted in religious knowledge. There are many more doubts stemming from natural sciences that can also captivate some devout individuals, such as criticisms targeting verses about embryology, mountains as pegs, and so on. While there’s no space to delve into their refutations here, they are abundantly available online for those who seek them, praise be to God.



Example of a Psychological or Emotional Doubt

A devout sister attending Qur'an memorization classes encountered a doubt challenging the fairness of sending messengers and their distribution. The argument was that the Qur'an only mentions messengers from the Arab region, implying a neglect of other parts of the world. The crux of the doubt is either that the Qur'an and the Lord of Islam are unjust for not addressing the rest of the world or, God forbid, that the religion is entirely fabricated. In response, I asked her about the verse: **“And We sent messengers We have mentioned to you before, and messengers We have not mentioned to you.”** (*Sūrat Al-Nisā: 164*)

She was astonished, as if realizing its meaning for the first time, despite having memorized *Sūrat Al-Nisā* by heart. This highlights how emotional and psychological influences can overshadow the recall of Qur'anic meanings during times of need.

I further explained that the wisdom behind mentioning messengers and prophets from the Arab region is due to its historical significance as a crossroads connecting the East and West, North and South. Every major civilization or renowned nation has either passed through this region or had its people reach it through trade and other means. Therefore, mentioning these messengers and prophets had a profound impact on the audience.

Factors contributing to the lack of religious knowledge among the devout

- Religious commitment without acquiring knowledge through listening or studying.
- Prioritizing memorization of the Qur'an over understanding its spirit and interpretation.
- Neglecting to instill the habit of questioning and seeking clarification when faced with doubts.
- A tendency to imitate preachers and scholars, adopting their outward practices without delving into the underlying knowledge.



2. Ignorance of the World as a Place of Trial and Test

This issue is a common and fundamental root in all challenges related to the problem of evil, affecting everyone from the most prominent philosophers and scientists to the simplest individuals, from devout believers to ordinary ones. As a believer, I might read extensively about trials in the Qur'an and Sunnah, teach others about them, or preach about them for years.

However, all this might not suffice when I personally face a real trial, such as the death of a loved one in an accident, imprisonment, or torture. At that moment, nothing will help except my belief that this world is a transient abode, not a permanent residence; a place of trials and tests, not paradise.

If I deeply internalize, understand, and firmly believe in this, every trial will seem insignificant, and the reward of enduring it for God's sake will be immense in my heart. This is the path of prophets, messengers, and righteous individuals, and the trials they endured.

Trials in this life are like a cup from which everyone must drink, but the experience varies from person to person based on the strength of their faith and certainty, and the true nature of their soul that God reveals through these tests. God says: **“And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient.”** (*Sūrat Al-Baqarah: 155*)

He also says: **“Every soul will taste death. And We test you with evil and with good as trial; and to Us you will be returned.”** (*Sūrat Al-Anbiya: 35*)

And: **“He who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed—and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.”** (*Sūrat Al-Mulk: 2*)

And finally: **“Do the people think that they will be left to say, ‘We believe’ and they will not be tried?”** (*Sūrat Al-Ankabut: 2*)



Factors Leading a Devout Believer to Go Astray Due to Trials:

- An overly idealistic perception of worldly life.
- Reading the Qur'an without contemplation, even if one has memorized it.
- Neglecting the stories of the trials faced by prophets, messengers, righteous individuals, companions, and early generations.
- Engaging in dry worship devoid of a deep connection with God, for whose sake



3. Excessive Idealism

This issue stems from the topic of trials and tribulations. When someone grows up without witnessing any serious manifestations of evil, their peaceful upbringing often confines their mindset within an idealistic world—one where they assume everyone is like them, thinks kindly like they do, and harbors the same good intentions. But the passage of years is enough to reveal the true face of life and the difference between thinking ideally and allowing excessive idealism to dominate one’s reasoning.

Life is not as you imagine, nor are people as you expect. Among them are those who lie about Allah, betray others, oppress and tyrannize, accept bribes, give false testimony, commit murder, theft, and more—enough to bring your view of life down to reality. This is not the problem in and of itself.

The real issue lies with those who are shocked by this contrast to their idealism. For example, a committed believer might feel shaken when they witness inappropriate behavior from another Muslim who is supposed to be equally committed, or even from a preacher or scholar. This applies likewise to many other aspects of life beyond religion—like corruption at work, a rebellious wife, an overbearing husband, ungrateful relatives, or the death of children and innocents. All of this can have the effect of shaking one’s faith or sowing doubt, especially among those whose thinking is shaped by:

- Seeing the trials of righteous people—whether oneself or others—as too great.
- Being shocked by the misconduct of fellow committed Muslims.
- Struggling with the views or positions of scholars and preachers.
- Finding it difficult to reconcile with the illness or death of children, and the innocent.

Excessive idealism can make a person hypersensitive to all of this, to the point where, unfortunately, they may be led astray at some point. They forget that true, perfect life is not in this world, but in Paradise in the Hereafter, by the permission of Allah: **“The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play. But the home of the Hereafter is certainly the true life—if only they knew.”** (*Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt*: 64)



4. Being Overwhelmed by the Trials of the Righteous—Whether Yourself or Others

Unfortunately, some committed believers begin to think poorly of Allah when they witness trials in their own lives or in the lives of other righteous individuals. It seems enormous in their eyes, as if they are shocked that Allah would allow such hardship to befall someone close to Him. This is due to their ignorance—or blindness—of two great wisdoms behind the trials of the righteous: that such tests raise their ranks due to their patience, and that they cleanse them of sins so that they may meet Allah without burden.

The Prophet ﷺ said—as reported in Sunan al-Tirmidhī: “A believer—man or woman—continues to be tested in their self, children, and wealth until they meet Allah free of sin.”

If being close to Allah meant being spared from tribulations, then the ones most deserving of such protection would be the messengers and prophets—for they are Allah’s chosen ones, the nearest to Him. Yet look how some of them were tested: the Jews even killed them! Allah mentions this twice in His Book: “...those who kill the prophets unjustly.” (*Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*: 181 and *Sūrat al-Nisā*: 155)

And not only the prophets and messengers, but even their followers—right under Allah’s watchful gaze, though He is fully capable of saving them. Yet He grants them endurance through what befits His majesty, casting into their hearts a coolness of certainty and firmness in faith, even as they are thrown into blazing fire: “They said, ‘Burn them and support your gods—if you are to act!’ We said, ‘O fire, be coolness and safety upon Ibrāhīm.’” (*Sūrat al-Anbiyā*: 68–69)

“By the sky containing great stars... [and] those who burned the believers in the ditch—fire supplied with fuel... They sat by it, watching what they were doing to the believers. And they resented them only because they believed in Allah...” (*Sūrat al-Burūj*: 1–8)



This is Allah’s enduring law regarding His righteous servants—those who stood firm against the tyrannical force of disbelief and its oppression. Allah says: **“Do you think you will enter Paradise while there has not come to you the like of what came to those who passed before you? They were afflicted by misery and hardship and were shaken until [even] the messenger and those who believed with him said, ‘When is the help of Allah?’ Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near.”** (*Sūrat al-Baqarah: 214*)

Even our noble Prophet ﷺ—Allah relates to us the harrowing situation he and his companions faced during the Battle of the Confederates (*al-Aḥzāb*), when the enemy forces encircled Madinah from all sides, and the Jews turned against the Muslims, exposing their vulnerabilities. Allah says: **“When they came at you from above and below you, and when eyes grew wild and hearts reached the throats, and you assumed about Allah [various] assumptions. There, the believers were tested and shaken with a severe shaking.”** (*Sūrat al-Aḥzāb: 10–11*)

That is why Allah sometimes leaves scenes of the believers’ patience in the face of torture as a sign and proof for every sincere seeker of truth—evidence of their true faith and conviction in what Allah has prepared of reward and recompense. Has the committed Muslim not heard the saying of the Prophet ﷺ: “Those who came before you used to be seized, and a pit would be dug for them in the ground, and they would be placed in it. Then a saw would be brought and placed in the middle of his head, and he would be split into two halves. And iron combs would be used to scrape his flesh from his bones. Yet none of that turned him away from his religion.”⁽¹⁾

And before someone suspects that Allah may test them with a tribulation beyond what their faith can handle, let them remember what Allah says in His perfect revelation: **“Allah does not burden a soul beyond what it can bear.”** (*Sūrat al-Baqarah: 286*)

In fact, we have seen in real life and on screens how some Muslims, tortured to death, had their final words be the two testimonies of faith, with their finger raised in the declaration of *Tawḥīd*. Is such a person not more composed than someone who uses the image of torture as a reason for their disbelief, atheism, or doubt in religion?

And if death is inevitable—unavoidable—then why turn away at the moment of tribulation if it comes by Allah’s decree? Is that better, or is it better to remain firm and end one’s life upon what one has lived upon, not wavering in the slightest, knowing that what is with Allah is better?

Because of this, you will find no concept more emphasized in the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and in the advice and writings of the major Muslim scholars than the command to have patience. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, as narrated by Muslim and others: “Whoever strives to be patient, Allah will make him patient. And no one is given a gift better and more expansive than patience.”

(1) Its grading and commentary have been previously cited from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.



The Prophet ﷺ was also asked: “Who are the people most severely tested?” He replied: “The prophets, then the next best, and then the next best. A person is tested in accordance with the level of their religion. If there is strength in his religion, his test will be increased. And if there is weakness in his religion, the test will be lightened.”⁽¹⁾

So then...

It is not permissible for a Muslim whom Allah has blessed with the gift of religious commitment to neglect, even for a moment, these missing foundations and clear truths of his religion. Nor is it permissible for him to think ill of Allah, for doing so amounts to viewing oneself with arrogance. Such a person keeps seeing Allah’s decree and destiny as unbefitting for someone of his “status” or “level of commitment,” forgetting even his own sins, which may well be the reason for his trial—either as punishment or expiation. It is as if he sees his Islam as a favor upon Allah!

“They regard it as a favor to you that they have accepted Islam. Say: ‘Do not regard your Islam as a favor to me. Rather, Allah has favored you by guiding you to faith—if you are indeed truthful.’”
(*Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt*: 17)

Ibn al-Qayyim—may Allah have mercy on him—describes this state with precision, saying: “Most people—indeed, almost all of them except those whom Allah wills—think ill of Allah, assuming things about Him that are not true. Most human beings believe that they are being shortchanged, that their share has been diminished, and that they deserve more than what Allah has given them. The inner voice of the soul says, ‘My Lord has wronged me, and has withheld what I deserve.’ His very self bears witness to this, even if his tongue denies it and he doesn’t dare to say it aloud.

Whoever deeply examines his own soul and explores its hidden recesses will find this attitude lying dormant—like fire hidden in flint. Strike the flint of anyone, and the sparks will tell you what lies within. If you examine enough people, you will find them blaming divine decree, suggesting that things should have gone differently, that this should’ve been, or that should’ve happened. Some complain a little, some much. And search your own soul—are you free of this?⁽²⁾

All of the above is not something I say from a distance; rather, I remind myself before anyone else. I ask Allah for steadfastness during trials and tribulations—for when they come, words are of little use. O Turner of hearts, keep my heart firm upon Your religion⁽³⁾.

(1) Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in his Sunan (no. 2398), and authenticated by Al-Albānī.

(2) In his book *Zād al-Ma’ād* (4:184–186).

(3) Taken from an authentic ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ, narrated by al-Tirmidhī in his Sunan (no. 2140), and by Aḥmad in his Musnad (no. 12128), and authenticated by Al-Albānī in *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* (no. 102).



Among the factors that contribute to this crisis among some committed Muslims are: Excessive idealism in believing the righteous are exempt from trials

- Ignorance of the reality of trials and tests in this worldly life
- Thinking ill of Allah—even by those who believe in Him
- Thinking poorly of righteous people, assuming they must have weak faith when faced with tribulations
- Weakness in attaching one's heart to Allah, in understanding His worship, and in loving Him



5. Exaggerating the Impact of Misconduct by Practicing Muslims

In every society, when someone affiliated with a certain group, system, or law makes a mistake, that error is not immediately generalized to the entire group, system, or law—at least not before closely examining the context. Instead, the blame is usually placed on the individual until it becomes clear that the fault lies deeper.

This is the language of reason and sound thinking—free from emotional outbursts or personal grievances.

Those who practice Islam do not represent proof *for* Islam; rather, Islam is a proof *against* them if they fail to follow even a single aspect of it, regardless of their status or reputation. For instance, during the Battle of Uḥud, the archers disobeyed the command of the Prophet ﷺ not to leave their position on the hilltop. When they saw the Muslims appearing victorious and the enemy fleeing, abandoning their spoils, they left their post—leading to a reversal of the battle’s outcome, just when victory seemed near!

“And Allah certainly fulfilled His promise to you when you were killing them by His permission, until you lost heart and disputed about the matter and disobeyed after He had shown you what you loved. Among you are some who desire this world, and among you are some who desire the Hereafter. Then He turned you away from them to test you. And He has already forgiven you. And Allah is Gracious to the believers.” (*Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān: 152*)

Look how a single act of disobedience led to disaster for the Muslims: the Prophet ﷺ was wounded in his face, and around seventy Companions were killed on that day. Would any rational person claim that this was the fault of Islam or the Prophet’s command?



So then—how does a person move from criticizing the wrong actions of individual Muslims to doubting the religion itself or even to atheism?

And that’s assuming that the individuals in question were truly committed Muslims. As we’ve clarified earlier, most of those who fall into such doubts are merely outwardly observant without real understanding of the religion, whether they’ve memorized the Qur’an without comprehending its meanings, wisdom, and lessons, or whether they adopt the appearance of religiosity (such as wearing a beard or specific attire) without possessing a share of true religious knowledge.

This reminds me of a practicing colleague I once worked with. One day, he asked me: Why do most of the business issues he faces occur between him—someone committed to Islam—and other similarly observant clients? Why don’t the same issues arise with non-practicing ones?

I asked him: “Do you and your practicing clients document your agreements and payments as instructed in the Qur’an, like in the verse about contracts?”

He replied: “No.”

I said: “And what about your dealings with non-practicing clients?”

He said: “With them, we record and formalize everything.”

So, I told him: “Then you’ve answered your own question. When you relied on presumed goodwill between ‘practicing’ people, you neglected to document and register your dealings, despite Allah, who knows human nature best, instructing us to write everything down as far as possible. People forget by nature, or get confused as time passes, especially with overlapping transactions. This isn’t an issue with your so-called ‘non-practicing’ clients, so your dealings with them remain intact.”

The point is that a committed Muslim may overlook or be unaware of, or even unintentionally neglect, certain religious obligations—resulting in mistakes or poor conduct in the eyes of others. After all, he is still human.

But what is truly puzzling is when someone, in response to a failing by one individual or group, generalizes the blame to the entire religion—claiming it to be inherently flawed or deficient, without deeper analysis.

Unfortunately, factors that contribute to such generalizations include:

- Excessive idealization of what religious people *should* be like
- Emotional bias against a certain type of observant individual, coupled with eagerness to catch their faults



- Ignorance of Islamic teachings, assuming the religion is whatever these individuals outwardly practice
- A weak spiritual connection to Allah and Islam, such that abandoning the religion becomes easy in response to disappointment



6. Overestimating the Opinions and Positions of Scholars and Preachers

What was said earlier about judging practicing Muslims by their individual mistakes also applies here to scholars and preachers. A shaykh or preacher—no matter how esteemed—is still a human being. They may have personal shortcomings and flaws just like anyone else. Even if these flaws are fewer, they are not nonexistent. Among the Companions—despite their great status—were those who erred in their personal *ijtihād*, and some even disagreed with one another on certain matters. While we certainly cannot compare ourselves to them, the point remains: no individual, regardless of who they are, can be taken as definitive proof against Islam. Rather, Islam itself is the standard by which all people are judged. So if you wish to hold someone accountable, judge them by Islam and its teachings—not the other way around.

Islam has never attributed infallibility to any human being—except to the one whom Allah Himself protected from error.

In fact, the renowned scholars of Islam—across all four madhhabs (legal schools) and among the righteous early generations—consistently warned against blindly following them in everything they say, especially if it turns out to be incorrect.

For this reason, there is frequent caution regarding *the slip of a scholar*, meaning an unexpected mistake from a scholar that the public may be misled by. Al-Dāramī narrated in his *Sunan* from Ziyād ibn Ḥudayr, who said that ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb once asked him: “Do you know what will destroy Islam?” He replied, “No.”

‘Umar said: “It is the slip of a scholar, the argumentative use of the Qur’ān by a hypocrite, and the rulings of misguided leaders.” (Authenticated by Al-Albānī)



And that's assuming the scholar or preacher spoke freely. But what if they were coerced—pressured by an unjust ruler or similar threat? Can they still be fairly blamed for an unusual or mistaken opinion under such circumstances?

Sadly, many practicing Muslims expect from scholars and shuyūkh a level of sacrifice that they themselves would never dare to offer if faced with even a fraction of the same risk—except those whom Allah protects. Don't these scholars have families, spouses, and private lives to protect, just like any other practicing Muslim? Yes, they are among those who ought to rely most upon Allah and fear none but Him. But at the end of the day, they are still human, with all the vulnerability that entails. It's simply not realistic to expect every scholar to meet that standard—especially when they know that if they are harmed, those who pushed them into danger will not be standing beside them.

Imagine, for instance, being alive during the great trial (*fitnah*) under the rule of the caliph al-Ma'mūn—the Fitnah of the Createdness of the Qur'ān⁽¹⁾—when scholars were forced to declare that the Qur'ān was created. Some were imprisoned, others were killed, and only a few stood firm. The rest, under pressure, compromised and went along with the caliph's heretical claim. So the question is: in such a time, is it just to pass judgment on a shaykh or preacher for a particular stance or opinion here or there, let alone use that as a reason to doubt Islam or fall into disbelief?

There is also an important legal point: When scholars change their views over time, some practicing Muslims who lack a solid understanding of *fiqh* (Islamic law) assume this to be inconsistency or hypocrisy. But that's not necessarily true—and we're not talking about so-called scholars who shift positions to suit media trends or political agendas). Some scholars genuinely grow in knowledge over time, which leads them to recognize errors in their earlier positions⁽²⁾. This was the case with Imām al-Shāfi'ī, whose legal opinions in Iraq evolved after his travels to Makkah and later Egypt, leading to the formulation of a revised body of jurisprudence.

Other times, a scholar may come to see a previous view as less correct or find a position that is more cautious (closer to piety), or one that is easier for the public to apply in practice. A notable

(1) For more detailed information, one may consult *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* by Ibn Kathīr, starting from the events of the year 218 AH and onward.

(2) In fact, he did not pardon those who continued to narrate his earlier views despite knowing that he had changed them. He said, “*I do not absolve anyone who transmits my old opinions.*” See *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* by al-Zarkashī (4/584).



example is how Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal held more than one opinion on certain issues over the course of his life⁽¹⁾.

So then...

Our duty is to recognize the truth and follow it—regardless of who else follows it or opposes it. Every person is accountable before their Lord for their own actions. As for a scholar who knowingly errs or intentionally misleads people out of arrogance or personal bias, then without a doubt, their sin is greater than that of others.

Several factors contribute to this problem among those who fall into it:

- An overly idealistic view of shuyūkh and preachers, imagining them to be free of faults.
- Ignorance of religion leads some to take scholars as proof *against* Islam, rather than understanding that Islam is the standard by which scholars should be judged.
- Going to extremes in criticizing every shaykh or preacher, constantly monitoring their every mistake, no matter how small.

(1) In some matters, he held two or even three different opinions—all of which were valid scholarly judgments (*ijtihād*) based on the evidence available for each. This is unless he explicitly stated that one opinion was based on increased knowledge or stronger evidence, such as a ḥadīth he had not previously known but later came across. At times, his shift may have also been due to choosing the view that is more cautious (*awra*'), as mentioned earlier. A case in point is his view on whether the divorce of a drunken man is valid. Initially, he held that it is valid. Later, he chose the opinion that it is not. His reasoning was that if he ruled it valid and was wrong, two serious consequences would follow: the wife would be unjustly separated from her husband, and she might then marry someone else unlawfully. But if he ruled it invalid and was mistaken, only one consequence would follow—that she remained with her husband.



7. Doubts about the Suffering and Death of Children and Innocents

There is a common misunderstanding that innocent people—especially children, infants, and the weak—should not experience pain or harm in this world because “they haven’t done anything to deserve it.”

The issue isn’t just the emotional response, but that it often extends into looking for someone to blame—as a kind of emotional release or projection of distress. Naturally, among those with weak knowledge and faith, the blame may fall on the Creator Himself—Allah—because “He is supposed to have the power to protect them.”

But this line of thinking is flawed. As we explained earlier, it contradicts the very concept of *ibtilā’* (divine testing). We’ll soon elaborate further—especially in response to those who assume that Allah has feelings like our human notions of sympathy or emotional softness, or those who confuse His attributes such as *ra’fah* (tenderness) and *rahmah* (mercy).

For now, what we need to understand is that life itself is a test, as we’ve already stated. It is not Paradise. The pain or suffering that a child endures at birth or in early years is part of the same test that could befall them at any later stage of life.

And as for the weak and the innocent, then they have, in truth, been spared from the burden of this world. And this world—by Allah—is nothing but a continuous stream of worries, each one handing you over to the next! Who wouldn’t long to meet Allah and find rest beyond it?

The Prophet ﷺ once saw a funeral procession and said, “Relieved and relieving.”

They asked, “O Messenger of Allah, who is the relieved and who is the relieving?”



He replied: “The believing servant is relieved from the exhaustion and harm of this world and moves on to the mercy of Allah. As for the wicked servant, people, lands, trees, and animals are relieved of him.” (Reported in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

As for children, the reason people are so emotionally affected by their suffering seems to be their young age alone. Adults suffer from pain and illness as well, yet the emotional reaction is not the same, indicating a lack of objective thinking.

Now, if the child is aware of the pain and endures it patiently, he will be rewarded for that. And whoever caused him harm will be held accountable, and Allah will grant the child justice on the Day of Judgment.

And if the child was not aware—such as a fetus with a soul or a newborn who dies shortly after birth—then they experienced only seconds of pain before meeting Allah. In this case, the test and trial fall more upon the parents than the child himself.

This is why the Prophet ﷺ said—as narrated in Musnad Aḥmad and Sunan al-Tirmidhī: “When a servant’s child dies, Allah says to His angels: ‘Have you taken the child of My servant?’

They say: ‘Yes.’

He says: ‘Did you take the fruit of his heart?’

They say: ‘Yes.’

He says: ‘And what did My servant say?’

They say: ‘He praised You and said, *Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji’ūn* (We belong to Allah and to Him we return).’

Allah says: ‘Build for My servant a house in Paradise and name it the House of Praise (Bayt al-Ḥamd).’”

Notice how Allah described the child as “the fruit of his heart”—a phrase only fully understood by someone whom Allah has blessed with a child. Because that love resides not only in the parents’ hearts but deep within their very core (*fu’ād*), the reward for remaining patient after such a loss is correspondingly great in the sight of Allah.

And what comes after?

Allah reunites that parent with their child in Paradise—if both are among the people of Paradise. In this way, patience becomes the path to reuniting with one’s lost child—if the parent’s love was truly sincere.

Once again...



These words may seem easy to say and pass over lightly in a lecture or conversation. But real patience is only known when one faces this kind of loss in reality—whether it’s me or anyone else. So may Allah grant us steadfastness.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself endured the death of his father before he ever saw him, the death of his mother when he was a small child, the death of his grandfather, and—after receiving prophethood—the death of his uncle who raised him, his beloved wife Khadījah, his uncle Ḥamzah, and many of his closest Companions. He also buried his only son, Ibrāhīm, when the child was just around eighteen months old.

He wept and said: “The eyes weep and the heart grieves, but we do not say except that which pleases our Lord. And truly, O Ibrāhīm, we are saddened by your departure.⁽¹⁾”

As for the emotional impact this issue has on some practicing Muslims—at times shaking their faith—we will mention the underlying causes in the next section, due to the overlap between them.

(1) Reported by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (no. 1220) and Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (no. 4279).



8. What About Children Born with Disabilities or Deformities?

This is another widespread misconception—common among both Muslims and non-Muslims—that when a child is born with a disability or deformity, it is “from Allah.” People often say that it is a test (*ibtilāʾ*) but still attribute the actual act of causing it to Allah. This is precisely where some individuals begin to be influenced by atheistic doubts—arguing that Allah has wronged these children by not creating them as sound and whole like the rest of humankind.

The truth is: these disabilities and deformities do fall under Allah’s universal will (*al-irādah al-kawniyyah*)—which we discussed earlier—but they are not from His *legislated will* (*al-irādah al-sharʿiyyah*). By His universal will, Allah allows evil to exist in the world—not because He loves it or commands it, but as part of the worldly test—so that people’s hidden intentions and the harm of evildoers can be exposed. Without this divine allowance, the wicked would never have the opportunity to oppress the righteous, the innocent, or children.

When we look closely at the root of the issue, we find that most cases of disability or deformity in children are the result of human wrongdoing—whether it be by the mother, the father, or those around them. These conditions often arise from the mother’s exposure to harmful chemicals, which may result from drug use, smoking, or alcohol consumption. Other causes include side effects from medications—whether knowingly or unknowingly taken—exposure to extreme heat, or harmful radiation. In fact, studies have even shown that a fetus can be negatively affected by the father’s smoking if he smokes heavily around the mother for extended periods.



All these human errors can cause harmful mutations in the baby's DNA⁽¹⁾. And yet, out of Allah's mercy, these mutations are not easy to occur. Allah has placed in every living cell highly precise mechanisms that constantly work to repair damage in the DNA, known as *DNA repair mechanisms*. In other words, were it not for the mercy of Allah, the number of disabilities and deformities in humans and other living beings would be beyond counting.

So then—who should be blamed?

In everyday life, when we see a perfectly designed car that was later damaged in a crash and taken to a scrapyard or repair shop, do we ever blame the designer of the car for the accident? Of course not! No rational person would.

In the same way, this kind of doubt—especially among some practicing Muslims—tends to arise due to several factors, such as:

- Excessive idealism about children's physical safety.
- A lack of scientific knowledge about the causes of disability and deformity.
- Overconcentration of emotional sympathy toward children and the weak, even though others also go through severe trials.
- Confusing emotional softness (*riqqah*) with genuine compassion (*shafaqah*).
- Not understanding the difference between *ra'fah* (tenderness) and *rahmah* (mercy).

We will elaborate on the last two points shortly, as they also appear in other doubts—such as excessive emotional discomfort with the punishment of disbelievers or the justice carried out against criminals.

(1) One of the worst examples of this kind of harm is what occurs to the unborn child of a drug-addicted mother. With the widespread opioid crisis in a country as large as the United States, there are shocking reports showing that an infant addicted to drugs is born every 25 minutes. Imagine the newborn experiencing drug withdrawal symptoms—tremors, pain, and intense crying—so severe that they are given morphine doses every few hours just to stabilize. This is the title and link to the report for those who want to read more: Every 25 Minutes an Infant is Born Positive to Opioids www.opiates.com/every-25-minutes-infant-positive-opioids



9. The Difference Between Emotional Softness (*Riqqah*) and Compassion (*Shafaqah*)

Many practicing Muslims who struggle with the problem of evil and show excessive emotional sympathy—even toward criminals—often fail to understand the important distinction between *riqqah* and *shafaqah*. To clarify:

Riqqah and *shafaqah* are both qualities that reflect an emotional response in the heart to witnessing suffering or harm—whether that harm is experienced personally or by someone else. However, there is a key difference:

If this emotional reaction is broad and general—felt simply upon seeing suffering, even if it happens to an enemy—then it is called *riqqah* (emotional softness). For example, imagine someone during the pre-Islamic era (*Jāhiliyyah*) burying his infant daughter alive out of fear of poverty or shame. Even as he committed this horrific act, he might still have felt a kind of softness in his heart (*riqqah*) toward her.

By contrast, *shafaqah* (compassion) refers to an emotional response to the suffering of someone you care about or don't want to see harmed. *Shafaqah* usually includes a desire and an effort to *remove* that suffering. This is why a mother is described as *shafīqah* (compassionate) toward her child, not merely *raqīqah* (soft-hearted).

Allah uses this word in the Qur'ān to describe those who fear for themselves because of His punishment: “**Indeed, those who are in awe of the fear of their Lord...**” (*Sūrat al-Mu'minūn*: 57)

The same term (*ishfāq*) is used to describe the angels' fear of Allah, and people's dread of the Day of Judgment. So we can say: *Riqqah* and *shafaqah* both refer to an emotional reaction in the heart toward distress or harm. *Riqqah* can be felt for *anyone or anything*—even for a criminal



being punished—while *shafaqah* is felt for someone we love, or do not wish to suffer, including ourselves. As such, *shafaqah* often leads to a real desire or effort to stop or prevent the harm.

So, both qualities—*riqqah* and *shafaqah*—are praiseworthy aspects of human nature, when used in their proper place. But they become problematic when misdirected. In other words: We must teach our children and youth that *riqqah* is natural and acceptable. It reflects our shared humanity, and it makes sense to feel softness in our hearts when we see someone suffer—whether it's a human, an animal, an enemy, or even a criminal at the moment of execution.

But *Shafaqah*...

That's different. We need to know when it is appropriate—and when it is not. Feeling *riqqah* for a murderer who is being lawfully executed is normal. But that should *not* turn into *shafaqah*.

Why? Because *shafaqah* involves actively wishing to *prevent* the pain or punishment. It often motivates a person to take action to stop it. But in this case, that would be in conflict with divine law, with justice, and with wisdom.

This is how we understand the error of those who defend criminals from receiving just punishment in this world, or disbelievers from facing punishment in the next. A just punishment is not an injustice. It is deserved recompense for a serious wrong.

Some of the factors that cause practicing Muslims to fall into confusion about this issue when discussing the problem of evil include:

- Excessive idealism and ignoring the nature of this worldly life as a place of trial and testing.
- Misplacing *shafaqah*, and therefore desiring that criminals not be punished.
- Failing to reflect on the magnitude of the sin or crime committed, the suffering of its victims, or the necessary consequences that follow from it.
- Failing to realize that Allah is described with *ra'fah* (tenderness) and *rahmah* (mercy), *not* with *riqqah* (emotional softness) or *shafaqah* (compassion in the human sense).



10. The Difference Between *Raʿfah* (Tenderness) and *Raḥmah* (Mercy)

The relationship between *raʿfah* and *raḥmah* is similar to that between *riqqah* (emotional softness) and *shafaqah* (compassion). However, while Allah is described in the Qurʾān as *Raʿūf* (Most Tender) and *Raḥīm* (Most Merciful), He is never described as *raqīq* (emotionally soft) or *shafīq* (compassionate in the human sense).

Raḥmah refers to bringing about what causes happiness, benefit, or well-being—even if it comes through some pain or difficulty. For example, a mother may allow a doctor to cut into her child in order to cure him because she *has mercy* on him.

As for *raʿfah*, it is the act of preventing harm, pain, or distress from occurring in the first place—or intervening before it happens.

Abū al-Baqāʾ al-Kafawī explained: “*Raḥmah* is to bring what brings joy; *raʿfah* is to repel what brings harm. *Raḥmah* comes from the aspect of giving or increasing goodness, while *raʿfah* comes from the aspect of removing or withholding harm. *Raʿfah* is an intensified form of mercy, focused specifically on lifting harm and pain. That’s why in the Qurʾān, when Allah describes Himself as *Raʿūf Raḥīm*, the word *raḥmah* comes after *raʿfah*—to indicate something broader and more encompassing.⁽¹⁾”

This distinction appears with remarkable precision in the Qurʾānic verse about the punishment of adultery: “**The woman and the man guilty of fornication—lash each one of them with a hundred lashes and let no *raʿfah* (tenderness) toward them hold you back from carrying out the law of Allah—if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a group of believers witness their punishment.**”

(*Sūrat al-Nūr*: 2)

(1) Cited in al-Kullīyyāt (1/742).



This verse explicitly prohibits *ra'fah*—because it means trying to *prevent* the infliction of pain, punishment, or harm. And this goes against the very purpose of the prescribed punishment for fornication.

So when Allah describes Himself as *Ra'ūf*, it means He repels harm from His servants and guides them to avoid wrongdoing before it happens. But when they do fall into hardship or harm, His name *Raḥīm* is even more appropriate—because He then brings healing and relief. In that sense, *Ra'fah* is prevention. *Raḥmah* is a cure.

Therefore, if a practicing Muslim learns—during childhood, teenage years, or early adulthood—the true meanings of *riqqah*, *shafaqah*, *ra'fah*, and *raḥmah*, and understands the difference between these terms as they apply to us *and* to Allah, and memorizes verses from the Qur'ān that forbid *ra'fah* in specific situations (such as in the punishment of adulterers), and understands how this relates to not showing *shafaqah* toward criminals being punished—then his emotions will become balanced. He will operate at the *natural* level of human emotion, without excessive sensitivity or emotional dullness.

Some of the factors that cause certain practicing Muslims to be shaken by this issue include: Imposing one's personal emotional lens onto the actions and rulings of Allah ﷻ.

- Assuming that Allah *must* intervene in every tragedy out of emotional softness or human-style compassion.
- Focusing only on one side of the story—namely, the suffering of this world—while ignoring the reality of the Hereafter.
- Forgetting how many trials were, in truth, acts of mercy... and how many calamities Allah deflected from us through His tenderness.



11. Witnessing Scenes of Torture Against Believers

Whoever loses sight of the fact that this worldly life is a place of testing, trial, and exposure will be the most vulnerable to faith-shaking doubts whenever they witness evil in the world and ask: “Where is Allah in all this? Why doesn’t He intervene?”

We won’t repeat here all the verses and prophetic reports we’ve previously mentioned, which affirm this foundational truth: that life is a test and trial. This truth lies at the very core of the problem of evil—and it is where every path toward disbelief or atheism must stop and confront the reality of divine wisdom.

Still, it is worth briefly recalling this principle.

When a practicing Muslim sees a fellow believer being tortured—especially in brutal or savage ways—his emotional reaction often arises from the religious teachings that have been instilled in his heart: that Allah is fully aware of all things, that He hears and sees everything, that nothing happens in the universe except by His permission, and that if He wills to stop something—such as this torture—He can prevent it.

Today, with the rise of the internet and social media, and the rapid sharing of graphic videos depicting atrocities and extreme suffering, Muslims are being exposed to levels of violence they may have never imagined. And this has had a major role in the rise of atheistic thoughts—doubts that would never have surfaced so easily if such horrors remained confined to the written pages of history or secondhand reports.

The history of human civilizations, both ancient and modern, is filled with horrific examples of torture, violence, terror, and crime. But most of these accounts are preserved only in writing, and only a small number were ever depicted visually. As a result, the emotional impact of reading about such things was never as powerful as what happens today—especially for those whose hearts are extremely sensitive or inclined to excessive compassion.



What's more astonishing is that some people *actively seek out* these gruesome, bloody scenes out of curiosity. I once met a Muslim whose faith was deeply shaken after he watched several real-life videos of crimes and torture found on the “dark web,” where there is no censorship or law. It's as if they are trying to answer—literally—the question: “Who will fill Hell?”

So then...

It is not wise—especially if your heart is soft or highly sensitive—to watch graphic scenes of torture or violent killings, or to dwell on them. The heart recoils by nature from such things. So what, then, if the suffering person is someone you love, someone you know, or someone who shares with you the bonds of faith and kinship—not to mention even strangers?

Ka'b ibn Mālik reported: “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said on the Day of Uḥud: ‘Who saw the killing of Ḥamzah?’

A man said, ‘I did.’

The Prophet said, ‘Then come and show us.’

So, he went, and the Prophet followed until they reached Ḥamzah. He had been disemboweled, and his body mutilated. The man said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, he has been mutilated, by Allah!’

The Prophet ﷺ disliked looking at him. Then he stood among the martyrs and said: ‘I am a witness to these. Wrap them in their blood. For there is no wounded person who is wounded in the path of Allah except that he will come on the Day of Resurrection with his wound still bleeding—its color like blood, but its scent like musk.⁽¹⁾’

The point here is the Prophet ﷺ's dislike of looking at his uncle Ḥamzah in that state of mutilation.

Similarly, 'Urwah narrated: “My father, al-Zubayr, told me that on the Day of Uḥud, a woman came rushing forward. When she was about to reach the slain (to see their bodies), the Prophet ﷺ disliked that she should see them and said: ‘The woman, the woman!’

Al-Zubayr said, ‘I sensed that it was my mother, Ṣafīyyah (the Prophet's aunt and the sister of Ḥamzah). So I rushed toward her and reached her before she arrived at the bodies.⁽²⁾’

And again, the key takeaway: the Prophet ﷺ *did not want* his aunt to see her brother Ḥamzah's mutilated body.

(1) Reported by al-Bayhaqī in his Sunan (no. 6799), and by al-Ṭabarānī in al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr (no. 167). Al-Haythamī said in Majma' al-Zawā'id (6/119): “It was reported by al-Ṭabarānī, and its narrators are the narrators of al-Ṣaḥīḥ.”

(2) Reported by Aḥmad in al-Sunnah (no. 1418), and authenticated by al-Albānī.



So let one of us praise Allah who spared him from trials that others were tested with. For how many painful moments have pushed those with weak faith to the edge—making it easy for them to fall into the whisperings of Shayṭān...

It is not wise to expose oneself to every incident or scene indiscriminately—even if one’s intention or purpose is good. The Prophet ﷺ himself said, regarding *jihād*—which is among the greatest acts of worship and highest deeds in the sight of Allah, through which His religion is spread, His word is elevated, and Muslim lives and honor are protected: “O people, do not wish to meet the enemy. Rather, ask Allah for safety. But if you do meet them, then be firm, and know that Paradise lies beneath the shade of swords.⁽¹⁾”

So, there is no valid excuse for someone with a sensitive heart or an overly compassionate nature to pursue footage of killing, beheading, or torture, then find his faith shaken, while he could have simply avoided it. Even if his eyes fall upon such a scene by accident, he should turn away, avoid replaying it, and not stare at it. He should seek refuge in Allah and thank Him for having spared him from such trials.

This advice especially applies to someone who knows that such images could affect his faith. As for the balanced and spiritually grounded person: He knows that Allah is preparing a thorough recompense for the disbelievers. As the Prophet ﷺ said in the authentic ḥadīth agreed upon by al-Bukhārī and Muslim: “Indeed, Allah gives respite to the wrongdoer. But when He seizes him, He does not let him go.”

Then he recited: **“Such is the seizure of your Lord when He seizes the cities while they are doing wrong. Surely, His seizure is painful and severe.”** (*Sūrat Hūd: 102*)

Thus, what is the path of protection from such destructive thoughts?

It lies in reflecting on the Qur’ān, understanding it, and living with its verses and meanings—just as we’ve emphasized before. For example, the practicing Muslim who, in a moment of emotional anger or sorrow, asks: “Where is Allah when believers are tortured like this?”— We reply: “But where were you from the words of Allah that you’ve read hundreds of times in the Qur’ān? Haven’t you come across stories of tragedies that befell believers—under Allah’s full hearing and sight?”

Haven’t you read the story of the People of the Ditch (*Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd*)—whose tyrant king dug a trench, filled it with fire, and burned them alive—while Allah watched and heard?

“Cursed were the People of the Ditch, of the fire full of fuel, as they sat by it,

(1) Reported by Muslim in his Ṣaḥīḥ (no. 3282).



And they were witnesses of what they did to the believers. They tortured them for no reason other than that they believed in Allah—the Almighty, the Praiseworthy.” (*Sūrat al-Burūj*: 4–8)

Had Allah willed, He could have protected them through a miracle or a decree of His divine will. But they themselves were not deterred by this punishment. It did not push them away from faith or make them abandon their belief.

So then...

If such tragedies were truly a reason to abandon belief in Allah or to doubt His existence, they would have driven you away from the religion long ago. But they didn’t. Why?

Because *in truth*, they don’t challenge Allah’s existence. What changed is only that now you’ve *seen* them with your own eyes, and your soul couldn’t bear it.

Among the factors that contribute to being affected by this issue are:

- Excessive idealism, expecting that no evil should ever befall the innocent in this world of trials.
- Over-sensitivity and extreme compassion.
- Voluntarily watching videos and pictures of brutal crimes.
- Forgetting the purpose and wisdom of this life, especially the role of trials for the believers and the righteous.
- Losing sight of the stories of the prophets and their followers in the Qur’ān, and all that they endured.



12. Will Everyone Who Didn't Enter Islam Go to Hell?

A Muslim is not someone who lives in isolation from the world—especially in our modern Age, when global travel and interaction with non-Muslims, both in our lands and theirs, has become easy and frequent. We are commanded to treat non-Muslims with kindness and fairness (*al-birr wa al-qist*)—so long as they are not actively at war with us or occupying our lands. Allah says: “Allah does not forbid you from being kind and just toward those who have not fought you because of religion or expelled you from your homes. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.” (*Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah*: 8)

Despite this, some practicing Muslims become confused by two main issues:

1. The vast number of non-Muslims. They wonder: “Could all these people really be in Hell?”
2. The good character of some non-Muslims, and the feeling that it would be unjust for such people to be punished in the Hereafter.

Here is a response to both concerns:

1. As for being shocked by the number of people who will enter Hell: This has no bearing on Allah whatsoever—even if *all* of humanity were to enter the Hellfire. Allah created mankind with free will and the ability to choose. He will hold them accountable accordingly—whether they all believe or all disbelieve. In the divine ḥadīth reported by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Allah says: “O My servants, you can never harm Me, nor can you ever benefit Me.

O My servants, if the first and last of you, humans and jinn, were all as righteous as the most righteous heart among you, it would not increase My Kingdom in the least.

O My servants, if the first and last of you, humans and jinn, were all as wicked as the most wicked heart among you, it would not decrease My Kingdom in the least.”



Allah has also informed us in the Qur’ān that He does not punish anyone until a messenger has been sent to them. Even those who will present excuses on the Day of Judgment—such as children, the mentally disabled, the deaf, or the senile—will be tested by Allah on that Day, as we’ve discussed previously. He says: **“We do not punish until We have sent a messenger.”** (*Sūrat al-Isrā’*: 15)

So no one will enter the Hellfire except after a clear proof from Allah has been established against them.

This means the individual must have received Allah’s message or command, and then consciously rejected it, turned away from it, or arrogantly denied it.

As for those who never received Allah’s message—or received a distorted, incomplete version of Islam, as is often the case due to today’s biased media—then we do not pass judgment on their specific fate in the Hereafter. Only Allah knows their true condition. However, we still apply the worldly rulings for disbelievers to them—such as those related to marriage, inheritance, and so on—in order to organize societal transactions.

2. As for the objection that sending well-mannered non-Muslims to Hell seems unjust: This arises from a misunderstanding of divine justice (*‘adl ilāhī*) on the part of someone who claims to be a believer. Let’s look at this from two angles: From the standpoint of the condition for entering Paradise: A person enters Hell not because of a lack of good character, but because they failed to bring the one requirement that Allah demanded: belief in Him as Lord, Creator, and the One to be obeyed. Imagine you established a condition for entering your house—something within everyone’s ability—but some people arrogantly refused to meet that one condition, even if they brought everything else you didn’t ask for.

Or imagine someone who is polite and kind to everyone—except his own parents, refusing to even acknowledge their existence, despite all the good they’ve done for him. What benefit is his good conduct to others when he’s denied the most basic right of those who gave him life?

From the standpoint of knowledge:

Allah knows best what lies within every soul, and whether someone truly deserves Hell or not. Even among Muslims, there will be those who enter the Fire because of unresolved sins or rights owed to others—until either their punishment is complete or their faith brings them out.

The Qur’ān repeatedly reminds us of the difference between Allah’s knowledge and ours, such as in the following verses:

- **“It may be that you dislike something while it is good for you.”** (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*: 216)



- **“It may be that you dislike something, yet Allah brings about through it much good.”** (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*: 232)
- **“You argue about things you have no knowledge of. Allah knows and you do not know.”** (*Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*: 66)
- **“Do not set up comparisons for Allah. Truly, Allah knows and you do not know.”** (*Sūrat al-Naḥl*: 74)
- **“Indeed, those who love to spread immorality among the believers will have a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter. And Allah knows and you do not know.”** (*Sūrat al-Nūr*: 19)

There is an important point—rarely considered—that deserves attention: Just because a non-Muslim appears to have good character outwardly does not necessarily mean that this reflects who they truly are. A person may be concealing evil in their heart and mind, but has not yet had the opportunity to act on it. Their pleasant behavior might simply be an effort to maintain a good reputation among people (i.e., showing off), or it might be diplomatic, hypocritical, or driven by cowardice and fear of exposing their real selves in front of those more powerful than them.

Of course, this is not to say that all disbelievers, atheists, or non-Muslims are like this. But who can guarantee that if they were given full authority and power, they wouldn’t abuse it—especially given their distance from authentic divine revelation? Did they not reject the message of Allah even after understanding it? (Here, we are referring to the category of people who consciously and stubbornly rejected faith.)

Isn’t Allah the source of all good? So how could those who deny Him and His message be called “good” in essence?

You simply don’t know. The human soul is incredibly complex—layered, hidden, and as deep as the cosmos itself.

As the scholars say: “Allah knows what was, what is, what will be, and what would have been if it were to happen.”⁽¹⁾

This is unanimously agreed upon among the imams of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah.

There are many historical examples where Muslims lived peacefully, justly, and kindly alongside non-Muslim neighbors—Christians or Jews—over centuries, preserving their rights and treating them fairly. But when colonial foreign powers invaded Muslim lands, some of those same neighbors joined the invaders—betraying their Muslim neighbors, siding with the aggressors, and aiding in their oppression.

(1) See Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, commentary on Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt, verse 3. This point was also mentioned by al-Nawawī in his commentary on Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, by Ibn Taymiyyah in his Fatāwā, by Ibn al-Qayyim in his Nūniyyah, and by many others.



Of course, we do not generalize this act of betrayal or treachery. Not every disbeliever is inherently evil—after all, many have sincerely accepted the truth and embraced Islam. But these examples highlight how appearances can deceive.

So where did all the smiling faces go? What happened to good neighborly relations, centuries of peaceful coexistence, and the appearance of kindness and harmony?

It all disappeared in a matter of hours.

A striking example of this was observed in a famous American psychological experiment. The U.S. Navy funded a study to explore the causes of conflict between prisoners and guards in prison environments. Dr. Philip Zimbardo, a psychologist at Stanford University, led what became known as the Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971⁽¹⁾.

Volunteers were hired and assigned roles—some as “prisoners,” others as “guards”—at \$15 per day (roughly equivalent to \$75 today). The guards were given unrestricted authority to do whatever they wanted to the prisoners, without accountability—mirroring real-life scenarios like military prisons or detention centers where oversight is often lacking.

The result? The guards quickly developed sadistic behaviors. They began to enjoy humiliating, mocking, and abusing the prisoners—some of whom were their peers in real life before the experiment! The abuse escalated to such a level that the experiment had to be forcibly shut down after just six days (from August 14 to 20, 1971), even though it was originally planned for two weeks.

Many of the prisoners, deeply distressed, were recorded on video begging for the experiment to stop. These recordings are still publicly available online.

Years later, during the public outcry over the Abu Ghraib prison abuses in Iraq following the U.S. invasion in 2003—where American soldiers serving as guards were accused of heinous acts of torture and humiliation—Dr. Zimbardo was once again invited to speak publicly. Based on his earlier research, he confirmed that such behavior was indeed possible: individuals can change and adopt abusive, sadistic behavior when placed in environments of unchecked power.

The point here—without going further into detail—is that several factors can make people vulnerable to certain doubts surrounding the punishment of non-Muslims in the Hereafter, including: Excessive idealism, imagining a happy ending for everyone—even the oppressors.

(1) The full story can be found at the following website: www.prisonexp.org



- Ignorance of Allah's justice and entertaining bad thoughts about Him.
- Ignorance of the true condition for entering Paradise and being saved from Hell: belief and *Tawhīd* (affirming the oneness of Allah).
- Excessive compassion and emotional softness that sympathizes with those who have knowingly rejected the truth once it reached them.



13. Eternal Punishment in Hell—But Disbelief Was Temporary?

Another doubt, closely connected to the previous topic, concerns the objection: *How can the punishment of Hell be eternal when the sin of disbelief happened during a limited lifetime?*

This emotionally driven argument can be addressed from multiple angles:

First: The sin of disbelief is a crime against Allah, the Almighty, the Most Great. He clearly warned the disbelievers about this punishment and cautioned them repeatedly. Yet, they persisted. So, who is to blame?

Allah says: “**That is because they loved the life of this world more than the Hereafter, and Allah does not guide the disbelieving people.**” (*Sūrat Āl Imrān*: 28)

And He also says: “**They will have layers of fire above them and layers beneath them. That is how Allah frightens His servants: O My servants, so fear Me!**” (*Sūrat al-Zumar*: 16)

If you truly believed in Allah and in the reality of what He warned us against, why did you disbelieve and expose yourself to it—and now complain and protest?

And if you claim not to believe in Allah at all, why concern yourself with arguing over a punishment you don’t believe exists?

Second: The one who died as a disbeliever or atheist during this brief worldly life—did he die intending to ever believe? Or did he die firmly intending to *persist* in his disbelief or denial, even if he lived forever?

If he had a sincere intention to believe, Allah would not have let that good in his heart go to waste. He may be like the man in the authentic ḥadīth who killed ninety-nine people, then set out to repent, died on the way, and Allah brought him near and forgave him.



But if he had no intention of believing, stubbornly rejecting faith regardless of how long he lived, then how has Allah wronged him if his punishment is eternal for a crime that would have continued forever had he not died?

Third: Whoever said—rationally—that punishment must match the crime in *duration*?

If someone murders, steals, or assaults another in minutes, do we punish them for mere minutes? Or do we impose a sentence proportionate to the *severity* of the crime?

Thus, let's ask: Is there *any* crime worse than disbelief in, or associating partners with, the Creator of the universe?

You might insult a child, and no one pays much attention. Insult a coworker, and you may face consequences. Insult a manager, a governor, or a president—and the penalty increases with the rank of the one you offended.

Now consider: Allah cannot be harmed, but *He can be offended* by the arrogance and denial of His creation. As He said: **“Indeed, those who harm Allah and His Messenger—Allah has cursed them in this world and the Hereafter and prepared for them a humiliating punishment.”** (*Sūrat al-An‘ām: 27–28*)

And the All-Knowing says: **“Until, when death comes to one of them, he says, ‘My Lord, send me back so I may do righteousness in what I left behind.’ No! It is only a word he is saying. And behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected.”** (*Sūrat al-Mu‘minūn: 99–100*)

We can clearly see, then, how weak this doubt becomes when examined through reason, scripture, and sound judgment.

Factors that allow such doubts to take root in the heart of even practicing Muslims include:

- Excessive idealism that ignores the gravity of the crime while overemphasizing the severity of the punishment.
- Over-sentimentality and compassion toward disbelievers being punished in Hell.
- Loss of correct perspective regarding the balance between crime and consequence.
- Failing to grasp that belief in Allah is the *greatest* matter in all existence.
- The contradiction of objecting to something—like Hell—that the atheist supposedly doesn't even believe in!



14. Why Did Allah Create the Disbeliever Knowing He Would Never Believe?

Sometimes, a Muslim or believer—out of compassion for the disbeliever—might ask, or be asked: “Why did Allah create him if He knew he would never believe?”

The question, whether intentional or not, subtly implies that Allah has wronged such a person. To this we say: True injustice would be if the person *had no ability* to believe, yet Allah created him and then punished him for something beyond his capacity. That would be like someone cutting off a man’s hands, then demanding that he clap—and punishing him if he doesn’t.

But if belief *was within the person’s ability*—and he simply chose not to believe, out of negligence or arrogant denial—then such a person *deserves* punishment, and no injustice has occurred. Especially since Allah originally created all His creations—those with free will—for Paradise and eternal bliss. He created them for good, *not* for evil.

Imagine a student who is fully capable of studying and passing (emphasize: *capable*). You enroll him in a school, hoping he learns, improves, and eventually graduates. Now ask yourself: would any rational person accuse you of wronging him?

The answer is clearly no.

Injustice would be if that student had no ability to study or understand, yet you forced him to go to school and punished him for failing. But if you knew that he could succeed, then enrolling him in school was a kindness from the start. He is the one who chose failure—either for himself or through misguiding others. And when he could no longer find an excuse to justify his failure, he placed the blame back on the one who showed him kindness to begin with—the one who created him, or enrolled him in the school, and so on.

So then...



Sound logic is not in blaming the *benefactor*, but in holding accountable the one who failed *by choice*. Blame the sinner, who had the ability not to sin. Blame the rejecter—who had the ability not to reject.

Allah says: **“Has not the news reached them of those before them—the people of Nūḥ, ‘Ād, Thamūd, the people of Ibrāhīm, the companions of Madyan, and the overturned cities? Their messengers came to them with clear proofs, but it was not Allah who wronged them; rather, they wronged themselves.”** (*Sūrat al-Tawbah: 70*)

So how could anyone who believes in Allah’s justice ever imagine that He would wrong anyone?

Only those who follow the path of *al-Jabriyyah* (the determinists)—and those caught in their orbit—fall into this error, sadly.

Before we mention the factors that make one vulnerable to this doubt, let us briefly introduce another closely related question that often stems from the same flawed assumptions.



15. Why Does Allah Allow Disbelievers to Persist in Their Disbelief?

This is another doubt that sometimes arises in the mind of a practicing Muslim—especially one without sound knowledge. If such a person had truly pondered the Qur’ān, they would realize that Allah does not favor anyone unjustly. What He does with disbelievers, He does equally with believers:

He facilitates the path that each person has freely chosen for themselves.

Nothing more, nothing less. The principle is simple: *The reward matches the deed.*

As He says about the believers: **“And those who are guided—He increases them in guidance and grants them their righteousness.”** (*Sūrat Muḥammad: 17*)

So just as He increases the guidance of those who walk the path of guidance, He also speaks about those who received His messages, understood them, but then arrogantly rejected the truth: **“How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their belief and after they had witnessed that the Messenger is true and clear proofs had come to them? And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.”** (*Sūrat Āl Imrān: 86*)

This means that not every disbeliever is granted further time and ease in their disbelief. Rather, it is only those who *received* the truth, had the proof established against them, and then knowingly rejected it.

About them, Allah says: **“In their hearts is a disease, and Allah has increased their disease; and for them is a painful punishment because they used to lie.”** (*Sūrat al-Baqarah: 10*)

And He also says: **“And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He caused them to forget themselves. Those are the defiantly disobedient.”** (*Sūrat al-Ḥashr: 19*)



And elsewhere: **“Had Allah known any good in them, He would have made them hear; but even if He had made them hear, they would have turned away while refusing.”** (*Sūrat al-Anfāl: 23*)

This helps us better understand His statement: **“And Allah leads astray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills.”** (*Sūrat al-Muddaththir: 31*)

Every person is initially guided through Allah’s mercy by being given the means of guidance. As Allah says: **“Indeed, upon Us is guidance.”** (*Sūrat al-Layl: 12*)

Remaining firm upon that guidance and having it increase is also by Allah’s favor and through one’s sincere supplication.

Conversely, every misguidance occurs by Allah’s will and perfect justice. Had He willed, He could have prevented all misguidance. But if He had done that, their belief would have had no value, and they would have lost free will and the purpose of the test, as we’ve explained before through clear verses.

Among the factors that make this doubt more likely to affect some practicing Muslims are:

- Excessive idealism that leads to assuming the best about those who knowingly and freely disbelieve.
- Over-sentimentality and emotional softness toward disbelievers and the idea of Hellfire.
- A lack of awareness of Allah’s justice and weak trust in His divine fairness.
- Insufficient knowledge of Islamic teachings and little reflection on the Qur’ān and its verses.
- Not recognizing the power of du‘ā’—whether made by a believer to remain steadfast and increase in faith, or by a sinner or disbeliever asking Allah to guide them to the truth.



16. Is the Ḥadd Punishment for Apostasy a Form of Coercion into Islam?

Another doubt that may arise in the minds of some practicing Muslims is the claim that the ḥadd (prescribed punishment) for apostasy is a form of injustice against those who leave Islam, or that it represents coercion into the faith. This is the so-called “apostasy punishment” doubt.

The truth is—leaving aside the historical rarity of its application across more than 1400 years and even up to today—and leaving aside the clear religious basis for the ḥadd of apostasy in both the Qur’an and Sunnah (a fact well-established by both texts and the actions of the early generations, from the Companions onward, until the modern period of intellectual and civilizational defeatism among some Muslims)—we will here focus only on the rational aspect of the issue.

Let us ask:

- Does the apostasy punishment truly contradict the wisdom and justice of Allah?
- Is it truly a tool to force non-Muslims into Islam?

Let us explore a few reflective points:

First: One of the quickest ways to expose the contradictions in such doubts is by pointing out the inconsistency of their premises. For example, if someone says that Islam is a lust-driven religion that sees nothing in women except their physical attraction, you might ask: *Then why does Islam mandate Ḥijāb for women? Why didn’t it promote adultery or prostitution? Why does it restrict sexual relations to marriage only?* This line of questioning undercuts the core of the doubt entirely.



We can apply the same logic to the claim that the punishment for apostasy was instituted to increase the number of Muslims or to *force* people into Islam. If so, why did Allah say: “**There is no compulsion in religion.**” (*Sūrat al-Baqarah: 256*)

And why did the early Islamic conquests not force the populations of conquered lands to embrace Islam by the sword? Consider regions like the Levant, Iraq, Egypt, and vast areas stretching from China in the East to Andalusia in the West. History—both Islamic and non-Islamic—does not record any widespread *coercion* of the populations of these lands into Islam from the time Islam entered them in the first Hijrī century until today (and the current state of many Arab countries testifies to this).

The French historian Gustave Le Bon wrote in his well-known book *La Civilisation des Arabes*:

“The reader will see—when we discuss the conquests of the Arabs and the reasons for their victories—that force was not the factor behind the spread of the Qur’an. The Arabs left the conquered peoples free in their religions. When some Christian communities adopted Islam and began speaking Arabic, it was because they saw a level of justice from their Muslim conquerors that they had never seen from their former rulers, and because Islam offered a simplicity they had not previously known.

History confirms that religions cannot be imposed by force. When the Christians subjugated the Muslims of Andalusia, those Muslims chose death and exile over abandoning Islam. The Qur’an did not spread by the sword—it spread by preaching alone.⁽¹⁾”

On the contrary, whenever there was coercion of non-Muslims into accepting a belief—as happened with a deviant sect (the Ismā’īlī Bāṭinī Rāfiḍīs in Egypt, falsely claiming descent from Fāṭimah)—the scholars and judges of Islam viewed such acts as completely contrary to Islam.

One example from the 4th Hijrī century: these rulers forced both Muslims and non-Muslims (Jews and Christians alike) in Egypt to adopt their heretical beliefs. This was condemned by the scholars of the time.

This is described by A. S. Tritton, professor at the University of London, in his book *Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects*. After citing several historical incidents from the era of the Companions and early caliphs regarding the implementation of the apostasy punishment on those who had *freely chosen* Islam and then left it, he explains the clear difference between those who *entered Islam by choice* and later apostatized, versus those who were forced into Islam. Tritton records that some Jews and Christians in Egypt who had been forced into Islam later returned to their

(1) Ḥaḍārat al-‘Arab, by Gustave Le Bon, translated by ‘Ādil Zu‘aytir, p. 134, Hindawi Foundation Edition, 2013.



original religions without being treated as apostates or subject to any ḥadd—particularly during the reign of al-Zāhir around the year 418 AH.

Dr. Tritton also mentioned the case of the Jewish man, Mūsā ibn Maymūn (Maimonides), who fled from al-Andalus to Egypt and returned to Judaism. The judge ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Baysānī did not consider him an apostate, stating: “A man who is coerced into Islam—his Islam is not valid according to Islamic law!” Dr. Tritton commented on this by saying: “This is a statement that reflects admirable tolerance.⁽¹⁾”

If Islam were truly seeking to increase the number of its followers through such methods or to compel people to enter it, non-Muslim and non-Arab historians would have transmitted hundreds, even thousands, of such cases—yet no such record exists.

Second: What often goes unacknowledged is that Islam is not just a religion. It is not a secular ideology that separates religion from life. Rather, it is a complete system: religion and state, religion and governance, religion and an entire system of dealings at the individual, familial, and societal levels. From this angle, Islam is like any other system of governance known to the world for millennia up to today. The question is: Have you ever seen a reasonable person object to a political system protecting itself and its society with laws?

Have you ever seen anyone protest against a government that sets red lines—be they social, religious, or political?

While Islam responds to apostates with dialogue and evidence exposing their lies, many of them avoid debate and evade discussion. They only seek freedom to publicly spread their fallacies and distortions—often for ulterior motives we will discuss shortly. Yet when we look at the supposedly most advanced Western nations, we find them doing far more than enforcing the ḥadd punishment for apostasy—without any objection!

In most of these countries, for example, anyone who incites discord or unrest in society, or who promotes ideas contrary to the ideological direction of the nation and its government, is arrested—or even killed—and no one pays attention to grand slogans like “freedom of expression” or “human rights.”

Take France, for example: upon experiencing events it labeled as “terrorism,” it declared a state of emergency. France 24 reported in November 2015⁽²⁾: “France will violate the European Convention on Human Rights due to the state of emergency.”

(1) See: *Ahl al-Dhimmaḥ fī al-Islām* (Non-Muslim Subjects Under Muslim Rule), authored by Dr. A. S. Tritton, translated and annotated by Dr. Ḥasan Ḥubshī, pp. 214–215, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 2nd edition, 1967.

(2) Short link: goo.gl/DDshG3 — you may search by title in case the link changes.



It is enough for any idea or activity to be described as “terrorism” or linked to “violent incidents” for international or local human rights protocols to be cast aside in the name of protecting society.

Then we have British Prime Minister Theresa May declaring, “I’ll rip up human rights laws that impede new terror legislation.”⁽¹⁾

And before anyone jumps to conclusions at the mention of “terrorism,” note that these governments apply the same stance even if it means killing civilians. When Theresa May was asked whether she would refrain from using a nuclear bomb that would kill 100,000 innocent civilians, she responded that she would not refrain—because such weapons exist so that their enemies know they will be used⁽²⁾.

Other European countries outright ban any mockery or criticism of their royal families—while permitting such treatment of the Prophet of Islam under the pretext of “freedom of speech”! Meanwhile, the United States prohibits any formal effort to promote communist or socialist ideologies that challenge capitalism—even though these are merely ideas or beliefs.

Likewise, when we return to France—the so-called land of freedom and law—it is strictly prohibited to *even question* the Jewish Holocaust, or to doubt the numbers that Jews continue to use to blackmail Europe and the world to this day⁽³⁾. And the charge of *anti-Semitism* is always conveniently ready to be thrown at anyone who dares to go against the tide and criticize Jews on any matter, big or small⁽⁴⁾.

So, the glorification of “freedom” is only wielded when casting doubts upon Islam, like the objection to the punishment for apostasy. Meanwhile, the Western world creates for itself an idol made of dates in the name of liberty, only to eat it when hungry and not care.

This explains what I mentioned earlier: that such objections (like the issue of apostasy punishment) only gained weight in our current era of psychological and cultural defeat. A *strong* society that refuses to tolerate internal discord does not feel the need to justify its judgments against those who threaten its cohesion with rejected ideologies.

(1) The English headline is from The Guardian, and the Arabic one is from Sky News Arabia: goo.gl/9vFxFPe.

(2) The link is from the British newspaper The Independent, dated 2016, and includes a video of her statement:

www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-trident-debate-nuclear-bomb-yes-live-latest-news-a7143386.html

(3) Among the well-known individuals who were imprisoned, fined, banned, or had their academic degrees and titles revoked as a result: the thinker and historian Roger Garaudy, historian Henry Roques, Swiss national René-Louis Berclaz, Belgian Siegfried Verbeke, British David Irving, and German Ernst Zündel—all of whom were prosecuted under the so-called Laws against Holocaust Denial.

(4) Similar to the above, under what is called the Global Anti-Semitism Law.



Look at China—implementing socialism, atheism, and oppression against Muslims and believers as it pleases. The United States, too, acts as it pleases, even in defiance of the United Nations and all international covenants. Its 2017 declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is a recent and vivid example. The same applies to every strong nation throughout history—so why is it not acceptable for a Muslim-majority state to refuse the spread of apostasy within its ranks?

We’re speaking of individuals who have nothing but recycled doubts that have been refuted hundreds of times. Yet they gnaw at the fabric of the Muslim society, targeting the common people, the uneducated, the children, and the youth—those who may not know how to refute such claims—while they themselves flee from any serious debate or discussion with scholars who would expose their ignorance or paid agendas.

In reality, Islam does not immediately prescribe death for the apostate. Rather, qualified scholars are to sit with the person, clarify his doubts, and answer his questions—whether that takes a short or long time. There is no sound textual evidence specifying a rigid three-day deadline, as some commonly claim. It can be extended indefinitely if deemed necessary by the ruler, the judge, or the scholars handling the case. Islam is a religion of reform and guidance, not one that seeks bloodshed or acts hastily.

Third: This deterrent of apostasy serves to prevent non-Muslims from taking Islam lightly—entering it with ulterior motives while knowing the consequences. Imagine the cunning of some People of the Book—Jews and Christians—when one of them publicly declares Islam today, then renounces it tomorrow, claiming all sorts of lies and accusations against the religion. This type of calculated deception—intended to mislead others—was exposed by Allah in the Qur’an when He said: **“A group among the People of the Book said: ‘Believe in what was revealed to the believers in the morning and disbelieve in it at the end of the day, so that they may return (to disbelief).’”** (*Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān: 72*)

I myself encountered this type of deceit about a year ago (in 1438 AH). I receive friend requests daily on Facebook from people I don’t know. I reject only those whose profile pictures or pages clearly display moral corruption. As for others—whether Christians, atheists, skeptics—I often accept them, hoping Allah may guide them through me.

One day, I accepted a friend request from a young Christian man from Upper Egypt. He told me he was thinking about Islam and was bothered by the polytheistic practices in Christianity—statues, images in churches, supplications to other than Allah, and so on. We had a brief chat in which I introduced him to the basics of Islamic *Tawḥīd* and what he should do if he decided to become Muslim.



He disappeared for a bit, then returned, saying he had accepted Islam. This took place privately over chat. I thanked Allah and congratulated him. He then disappeared again—perhaps expecting me to post about his conversion on my page or in groups, as some people do to bring joy to the believers. But I didn't, since I didn't know him in the first place.

He returned shortly after and told me he wanted the news of his conversion to be published. I told him not to rush and that he should study Islam more deeply before entering it. I invited him to ask me anything. He replied that he was fully convinced. I then said, "If so, then feel free to announce your Islam on your own account."

He replied that he wanted *me* to publish it. I told him honestly: "How can I publish your conversion when I've only just met you today? Why did you choose me?"

He said that when he saw my profile and noticed that I looked like a Shaykh in the photo, he felt that it would have a stronger impact if I were the one to announce his Islam. I replied, "If I were in your place, I wouldn't care much about the publicity. I would care more about learning Islam properly and purifying myself."

Thus, a strange conversation unfolded along these lines (and by that point, I had no doubt that this was a deceiver seeking to stir up trials among Muslims—assuming I was a novice who could be fooled). I also noticed that his tone became more aggressive, trying to provoke me into responding harshly. I chose instead to ignore him, as I had other responsibilities and tasks, and all praise is due to Allah.

Then, to my surprise, he entered my account and began insulting Islam, calling it all sorts of vile names—completely changing his tone and behavior, as we say, turning 180 degrees. I still did not respond to him, but I left him with one simple sentence: "Now do you see why I didn't announce your conversion?"

After that, he disappeared and deactivated his Facebook account.

Fourth: As a Muslim, I praise Allah that the matter of apostasy is surrounded by such a protective religious and social barrier. Without it, imagine hundreds of teenagers and young adults whom Allah has guided through my efforts and those of my fellow preachers and da'wah workers—what if any one of them publicly declared atheism, apostasy, or Christianity at the first doubt that deceived them?

Do you not know that most people, once they have *publicly declared* a position, feel compelled to stick to it afterward—sometimes out of pride or shame—even when they realize they were wrong? Only those whom Allah has mercy on are able to admit their mistake and retract.



But when these doubts remain private within the individual, we engage with them in gentle, compassionate dialogue—as one would with a brother or sister—until, by Allah’s permission, they see the truth. In such cases, that phase of doubt will not harm them, as no one knew of it. In fact, most of them later become Muslims with deeper knowledge and stronger conviction than before.

As for the one who wishes to apostatize or embrace atheism while remaining among Muslims and within their society—let him keep it to himself, out of consideration for the community to which he still belongs. Otherwise, let him leave. I swear, I have never seen a single ignorant or arrogant apostate who wasn’t actively spreading their misguidance to those around them—whether peers, family, or relatives—foolishly thinking they are “enlightening” them, when in reality they are only leading them astray.

And it is well known how easy it is to throw out a doubt in a single sentence, while refuting it may require deep knowledge and pages of explanation! Imagine someone saying: “There’s no need for steel reinforcement in concrete beams and slabs!”—a small statement any ignorant person could utter. But to correct this would require a specialist’s explanation that could take a page or two.

Now imagine if the state allowed such ignoramuses to speak publicly on medicine, business, the weather, etc.—wouldn’t they cause confusion, panic, and disorder among the people?

The question is: Would the state be accused of oppression or restricting freedom of expression if it silenced them, imprisoned them, or even expelled them to protect society?

If this is true regarding worldly matters, how much more so regarding religion, which is the most important aspect of life in general, and especially so for Muslims?

There remains one final point on this issue:

As we saw earlier, spreading doubts requires nothing more than a single ignorant sentence, while refuting them requires specialization in each relevant field. Unfortunately, some media outlets deliberately exploit this by having a *religious* shaykh respond to scientific doubts from an atheist in physics or biology, or having a scientist respond to *religious* doubts raised by an atheist regarding the Qur’ān, Sunnah, or Islamic jurisprudence. And Allah alone is our helper⁽¹⁾.

Among the factors that contribute to these doubts reaching the heart of a practicing Muslim on this issue are:

(1) I testify that over the course of eight years, I have seen only a handful of people—countable on one hand—who combined both natural sciences and Islamic knowledge. They are rarer than red sulfur. May Allah have mercy on the one who knows his own limits and area of expertise, adheres to it, and does not embarrass himself or distort the image of Islam through weak speech outside his field.



- Excessive idealism in imagining the sincerity and knowledge of apostates.
- Over-sentimentality and compassion toward disbelievers.
- A shaken view of divine justice—leading the Muslim to imagine that injustice could come from Allah.
- Doubts regarding the established boundaries of the religion (especially concerning the Sunnah and authentic ḥadīths).
- Lack of experience with the real conditions of apostates and their dangers to the general public and the uneducated.



17. The Misconception of Violence and Brutality in Islam

A practicing Muslim remains content and confident in his religion, viewing it as the ideal way of life—until someone confronts him with accusations of Islam’s so-called violence and brutality. This is especially the case when they cite isolated crimes committed by individuals or certain groups as supposed proof of their claims.

At that point, some practicing Muslims may begin to doubt the truth of their religion. But had they possessed even a basic level of religious knowledge—or familiarity with the biography of the Prophet ﷺ—such doubts would either collapse or would never have found space in their hearts and minds to begin with⁽¹⁾.

It is exactly like knowing the good character of your brother or close friend whom you have known your entire life, then one ignorant person comes along and accuses your brother or friend of bad character. Would you pay any attention to such a person? This is the state of one who knows his religion and the life of his Prophet ﷺ and has not limited himself to mere outward observance.

Here, I will apply the same principle I mentioned earlier: exposing contradictions in these claims by referring to what is already well known about the religion itself. I will not cite weak, fabricated, or false ḥadīths used to attack the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions. Rather, I will remind you of some of the many manifestations of mercy in Islam and in the Prophet’s teachings—even toward animals, which many people today belittle.

(1) This reminds me of dozens of discussions and debates I have engaged in—or been invited to—with young people who had begun to doubt Islam after reading certain doubts spread by Christians or atheists. Once I began the conversation and started refuting every such doubt with clear facts and authentic aḥādīth from the religion, the entire discussion would often turn into a lesson about the life of the Prophet ﷺ. Everyone present would then realize that the young man—or woman—did not actually know anything about Islam, or about the Prophet’s life and character to begin with! This is the bitter fruit of our neglect in religious education—in the home, in the mosque, in the school, and on official television channels, sadly.



For example—among many such teachings—Islam forbids killing through torture or obtaining rights through torture. It even forbids torturing animals for mere amusement or play. It prohibits killing without necessity.

It is narrated that Ibn ‘Umar saw some young boys who had tied up a bird to shoot at it. He said: “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ cursed the one who uses a living creature as a target.” (That is, shooting arrows or the like at it merely for sport.⁽¹⁾)

Likewise, the Prophet ﷺ once passed by a donkey that had been branded on its face (i.e., burned as a mark of ownership)—as reported in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim—and said: “May Allah curse the one who branded it.”

Moreover, both al-Bukhārī and Muslim narrated that the Prophet ﷺ forbade confining animals in such a way that they die (i.e., through starvation or neglect).

And here we may recall the famous authentic ḥadīth agreed upon by both al-Bukhārī and Muslim, in which the Prophet ﷺ said: “A woman was punished for a cat which she had confined until it died. Because of it, she entered Hell. She neither fed it nor gave it water when she confined it, nor did she release it so that it might eat from the insects of the earth.”

Also, in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Abū Hurayrah narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “A man was walking along a road when he became very thirsty. He found a well, climbed down into it, drank, and then came back up. There he saw a dog panting and eating mud out of thirst (since it could not reach water like a human could). The man said, ‘This dog is suffering from thirst just as I did.’ So he filled his shoe with water, held it in his mouth, climbed back up, and gave the dog water. Allah appreciated this deed and forgave him.”

They asked: “O Messenger of Allah, is there a reward for us even in (kindness toward) animals?”

He said, “In every living being with a moist liver, there is a reward.”

Abū Dāwūd narrated in his *Sunan* (authenticated by al-Albānī) from ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd, who said: “We were with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ on a journey. He went aside to attend to a need. Meanwhile, we saw a small bird with two chicks, so we took the chicks. The mother bird came fluttering around us intensely. The Prophet ﷺ returned and said: ‘Who has distressed this bird by taking its young? Return its young to it!’ Then he saw an ant colony that we had burned.

(1) What we will mention here are only a few selected examples of ḥadīths that address issues of killing and torture. Many other ḥadīths about the mercy of Islam in general—and the mercy of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ toward both humans and animals—have been omitted. The following ḥadīths are taken from the book *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn* by Imām al-Nawawī—in the chapter entitled: Prohibition of Torturing Slaves, Animals, Women, and Children—p. 280.



He asked: ‘Who burned this?’ We said: ‘We did.’ He replied: ‘It is not fitting for anyone to punish with fire except the Lord of the Fire.’”

And indeed, Allah the Exalted spoke the truth when He described His Messenger’s mercy toward all of creation: **“And We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds.”** (*Sūrat al-Anbiyā’*: 107)

If this is the case with animals, then what about human beings?

It is narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* that Hishām ibn Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām passed by some Nabateans in Shām (non-Arab farmers of that region) who had been made to stand in the sun while oil was poured over their heads (so that it would burn their scalps in the heat as a form of torture). Hishām asked: “What is this?” They said: “They are being punished over taxation.” (In another narration: “They were imprisoned over the jizyah.”)

Hishām said: “I bear witness that I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say: ‘Indeed, Allah punishes those who torture people in this world.’” He then entered upon the governor, informed him of this, and the governor ordered their release.

Even in the context of battle—where many people take advantage of war to discard all morality and values—look at this great ḥadīth in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: “When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ appointed a commander over an army or a detachment, he would especially advise him to fear Allah and to deal well with the Muslims under his command. Then he would say: ‘Fight in the name of Allah, in the way of Allah (meaning the motivation should be for Allah’s cause—not for wealth or worldly gain). Fight those who disbelieve in Allah (those who fight you or prevent the message of Allah from reaching their land). Fight, but do not embezzle (from the spoils), do not betray, do not mutilate (the dead), and do not kill a child (as the child has no hand in the fighting).’”

Abū Dāwūd also narrated in his *Sunan* (authenticated by al-Albānī) from Rabāḥ ibn Rabīʿ, who said: “We were with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ on a campaign. He saw some people gathered around something. He sent a man to see what they were gathered around. The man returned and said, ‘They are gathered around a woman who has been killed.’ The Prophet ﷺ said: ‘She was not one who would have fought.’ At that time, Khālīd ibn al-Walīd was leading the vanguard, so the Prophet ﷺ sent a man to him, saying: ‘Tell Khālīd: Do not kill women or laborers (i.e., hired workers who have no part in the fighting).’”



Even concerning the *manner of killing* itself, Islam intervened to prevent barbarity and cruelty—prohibiting heinous forms of execution such as burning, starvation, biological, chemical, cluster, or nuclear weapons that destroy crops and future generations⁽¹⁾.

The Prophet ﷺ commanded the Muslims to execute even capital punishment in the most humane way—quickly, without prolonged pain—and the same applies to the slaughtering of animals for food. In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, the Prophet ﷺ said: “Verily, Allah has prescribed excellence in everything. So, when you kill, kill well; and when you slaughter, slaughter well. Let one of you sharpen his blade and let him ease the suffering of the animal he slaughters.”

This is a practical Islamic view of life and the realities of warfare—preserving religion, wealth, and honor—as well as the necessity of eating from what Allah has provided of livestock. It avoids idealistic and imaginary notions that do not match reality or the truth of life⁽²⁾.

The point here is: if this is how Islam commands us to behave toward animals and even during warfare, can we imagine the opposite of that, even for a moment?

And in contrast: Today, the number of Muslims worldwide approaches 2 billion (a billion is a thousand million)—about one-quarter of the world’s population. If Islam were truly a religion of violence, brutality, terrorism, and savagery, would the world look as it does today?

Rather, if you look at the countries most attacked—where wars are deliberately fueled to drive the arms trade, steal oil, assert regional control, and engineer demographic changes—you will see that they are overwhelmingly Muslim lands: Burma, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Central Africa, and previously Bosnia and Herzegovina, among many others.

(1) It is enough to note that just seven individuals—criminals of materialist and atheist ideologies—killed nearly 120 million people in one century alone, through the most horrific methods and mass exterminations. This does not include those injured, displaced, or missing! They are: Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Adolf Hitler, Chiang Kai-shek, Vladimir Lenin, Hideki Tojo, and Pol Pot—as documented by Charles Philips and Alan Axelrod in their major three-volume historical encyclopedia published in 2004, entitled: *Encyclopedia of War: Encyclopedia of War — 3 Volume Set*, by Charles Philips and Alan Axelrod, 2004.

Incidentally, the same encyclopedia shows that wars fought for religious reasons account for no more than 7% of all wars throughout history—not as atheists and secularists often claim in their attempts to malign religion.

(2) Just like those who imitate the claims of vegetarians, saying they will not eat the meat of any animal out of supposed compassion and mercy. I once met one of them and said: “But your belt, your shoes, and your wallet are made from the hides of slaughtered animals! And most of the medications you take contain animal-derived ingredients!” He was unable to respond. I added another point: “And why make a distinction between animals and plants? Is it simply because plants have no voice? How do you know that plants do not feel pain when you cut and bite into them with your teeth? If you are sincere in your claim, then starve yourself rather than ‘torturing’ them by your logic. Or abandon this hollow idealism and simply eat from what Allah has created for you in the first place.”



And what is the stance of the official global media—and of Zionist-controlled media—toward all of this?

It is a media machine that raises an uproar if a few people are killed by a Muslim, but turns a blind eye to the daily deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians, unarmed people, and children in any of those countries—nor does it denounce their displacement, or the looting of their homes and property... as if they were not even human beings.

This is the primary factor behind shaping such doubts, which unfortunately find their way into the hearts of some practicing Muslims. Otherwise: According to official statistics by the FBI, regarding terrorist attacks from 1980 to 2005, it was found that 94% of those attacks were not carried out by Muslims!⁽¹⁾

Terrorism 2002–2005 — U.S. Department of Justice — Federal Bureau of Investigation

The global statistics site Global Research commented on this data, stating that it clearly shows the extreme exaggerations in branding Islam and Muslims as terrorists, despite the fact that over 90% of terrorist attacks in America are committed by non-Muslims⁽²⁾: “Non-Muslims Carried Out More than 90% of All Terrorist Attacks in America.”

The same holds true in Europe, which, by the way, was only lifted out of its brutal and bloody medieval darkness thanks to the influence of Islam. According to a European study, the headline read with deliberate irony: “All terrorists are Muslims... except the 99.6% that aren’t!”

In other words, only 0.4% of terrorism in Europe is perpetrated by Muslims. Just compare that with the media’s relentless fear-mongering and distortion. This was the title of the 2010 report⁽³⁾: “Europol Report: All Terrorists are Muslims... Except the 99.6% that aren’t.”

This is on the level of government statistics and official studies. But in reality, on the ground, the truth is even more striking.

In America, thousands of incidents occur every year involving beatings, killings of wives and girlfriends, rape, shootings, including school and university shootings. And yet, everyone acknowledges that the calmest neighborhoods are those where Muslims live, and they admit that the best manners—especially during times of crisis—are found among Muslims!

(1) www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005

(2) www.globalresearch.ca/non-muslims-carried-out-more-than-90-of-all-terrorist-attacks-in-america/5333619

(3) web.archive.org/web/20100201055528/www.loonwatch.com/2010/01/terrorism-in-europe



Of course, there is not enough space here to list the dozens or hundreds of real-life examples, but anyone who sincerely searches online today—through news reports, images, and videos—will find countless such stories.

Some involved individual Muslims who captured global attention—such as the Canadian Muslim who gave his own shoes to a poor barefoot man on public transport⁽¹⁾, then refused any media attention or to reveal his name!

Or the African-American Muslim Ibn Ali Miller, who stopped a street fight between two black teenagers and gave them heartfelt advice—coverage of which went viral in the global media⁽²⁾.

Or on the collective level: when American comedian Bill Cosby admitted that the American media intentionally distorts the image of Muslims, even though Muslims should be emulated in how they treat children, how they raise their families, and how they treat their women. Following this speech—which angered American politicians and media outlets—multiple false allegations of misconduct were fabricated against him⁽³⁾.

Or what happened recently in Houston, Texas, when Muslims opened four mosques to shelter victims of Hurricane Harvey in 2017, in addition to providing around 50 doctors, while one of the city's wealthiest and most famous churches (known for playing music during services) did nothing to help those in need⁽⁴⁾.

And the same kinds of examples you find in America and Canada can be found all over the world. Islam is truly the religion of noble character and human decency with all people.

Even one of the survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire in London wondered aloud why the media focuses on a few isolated Muslim-related incidents but fails to highlight their efforts in saving people, such as Muslims rescuing residents during the tower fire⁽⁵⁾.

In China, local media were amazed at the noble conduct of two young Syrian men who helped an elderly man cross between cars—helping him so much that they ended up carrying him!⁽⁶⁾

And to conclude with an example from the realm of charitable work and giving: a 2013 poll showed that Muslims in Britain were the most charitable in terms of donations, ahead of

(1) www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpvhXn22P2I

(2) www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfTZwvJGmjc

(3) www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdnRWaa9Els

(4) www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBb_j3CRbIk

(5) www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoVwOj9XtYo

(6) www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6kZsyToR40



Christians, Jews, and atheists⁽¹⁾: “Muslims ‘Give Most To Charity’, Ahead Of Christians, Jews And Atheists, Poll Finds.”

From all of this, we see that when a practicing Muslim is affected by such doubts about Islam being a religion of violence or lacking compassion, it is usually due to:

- **Ignorance** of the actual ethics and mercy of Islam, which are not mere theoretical ideals but are applied in reality.
- **Ignorance** of the global and local media’s schemes to distort the image of Islam and Muslims.
- **Focusing** only on bad examples, while ignoring the far greater number of good ones.
- **Harboring bad assumptions** about Islam and the Prophet of Islam ﷺ, and not reading about his life and noble character⁽²⁾.

(1) www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/07/21/muslims-give-most_n_3630830.htm

(2) Among the books that are simple in their language and helpful for this purpose are: *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn* by Imām al-Nawawī, and *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* (The Sealed Nectar) by Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī—may Allah have mercy on them both.



18. The Misunderstood Concept of *Du'ā'* (Supplication)

At times, those who spread doubts will exploit a believer's moments of need and distress—when their supplication appears delayed—in order to shake their faith, even if the person is practicing their religion. This happens especially when there is a lack of understanding regarding the wisdom of *du'ā'* and its proper *fiqh* (understanding), allowing such doubts to creep into the heart during moments of weakness or intense desire for an answer.

First and foremost, we must say: *Du'ā'* is itself an act of worship—an act in which the Muslim openly affirms their belief that only Allah controls all matters and destinies—neither idol, nor star, nor stone, nor tree, nor human—only Allah.

That is why it is narrated in the authentic *ḥadīth* found in Musnad Aḥmad, Sunan Abī Dāwūd, and elsewhere (authenticated by al-Albānī): “*Du'ā'* is worship.”

Thus, it is one of the clearest expressions of *Tawḥīd*. The Muslim does not turn to graves, the dead, or shrines in supplication—but places their need before Allah alone, with certainty that whatever Allah chooses for them will be best for them—whether in this life or the hereafter. For: How often have we supplicated for something that would have been harmful for us? And how often have we wished for something to be kept from us, when in fact it contained great good? Allah knows, and we do not know.

Yet there are several important points to clarify here:

First: *Du'ā'* is not a magical button that Allah has given to believers and denied to others. If it were so, then disbelievers would pretend to believe just to obtain such benefits! Rather, *du'ā'* is an act of worship in and of itself, as we explained moments ago.

Second: Although Allah has promised to answer *du'ā'*, this must be understood within its proper *Sharī* context and with its logical exceptions. Consider, for example, the verse regarding the wind



sent upon the people of ‘Ād: **“Then, when they saw it as a dense cloud approaching their valleys, they said: ‘This is a cloud bringing us rain!’ Rather, it is that which you were hastily demanding—a wind wherein is a painful punishment. It destroys everything by the command of its Lord.”** (*Sūrat al-Aḥqāf*: 24–25)

Now: does any rational person understand from “It destroys everything” that this wind literally destroyed everything on earth—mountains, rivers, distant lands outside the land of ‘Ād, or other people who were not among them?

Does anyone think it means it destroyed the angels, the jinn, the Fire, and Paradise?!

Of course not. There is a *Shar‘ī* and logical context for this expression: it refers specifically to the land of those mentioned in these verses who were being punished.

Likewise, Allah manages the affairs of billions of people at every moment. If answering the *du‘ā’* of every believer was an automatic and immediate response, that would be impossible in practical terms. For example, two righteous people may both pray to marry the same pious woman—should Allah divide her in half between them?! If this is impossible even between two individuals, what then of a wider scenario involving all believers, and beyond them, the rest of humanity?

Third: From the etiquette of *du‘ā’* is that a person should supplicate for matters that follow the natural laws and causes that Allah has set in His creation. A person should not rely solely on *du‘ā’* while neglecting necessary effort, but rather, they should do what is within their ability while placing their trust in Allah and seeking His help and success.

Fourth: Allah has promised to answer *du‘ā’*, as He says: **“And your Lord said: Call upon Me, and I will respond to you. Indeed, those who disdain My worship will enter Hell [rendered] humiliated.”** (*Sūrat Ghāfir*: 60)

But this response happens according to Allah’s will, His wisdom, and His choice for His servants. The answer may come immediately, or it may be delayed for days or even years. Sometimes the request may not be granted at all, but instead Allah grants the believer something better, or stores the reward for them as good deeds in the Hereafter.

Fifth: There are certain preferred times and places for making *du‘ā’*—so the Muslim should seek them out. Likewise, there are certain barriers to the acceptance of *du‘ā’*, such as unlawful earnings, unlawful food and drink, wearing unlawful clothing, or living in unlawful dwellings. A Muslim should avoid these things.

And in the end: There are distinct forms of wisdom behind the delayed response to *du‘ā’*. I will mention some of them briefly:



- **Testing one's certainty in Allah:** How many believers have had their certainty shaken by a delayed response!
- **Drawing closer to Allah:** How many people, distracted by worldly life, were brought back to closeness with Allah through need and supplication.
- **Humbling the arrogant:** Some people, spoiled by blessings and social status, forget their need and humility before Allah. Not all things can be bought with wealth or position—except if Allah wills.
- **Personal growth:** A subtle wisdom experienced by many believers—had Allah granted them what they asked for at the time, they would not have attained the knowledge, patience, contentment, insight, or deeper understanding of others that came through the delay.
- **Higher stations in the Hereafter:** A benefit often overlooked. The rank of those who are tested is so high that the people of well-being will envy them in the Hereafter! The Prophet ﷺ said, as narrated in Sunan al-Tirmidhī (authenticated by al-Albānī): “The people of well-being will wish on the Day of Resurrection, when they see the reward given to those who were tested, that their skins had been cut with scissors.”

In fact, there are people whose faith merits a high rank with Allah, but they are too weak to attain it through deeds alone—so Allah tests them through illness, a difficult spouse, troubles at work, or other trials to raise them to that rank through their patience and reliance upon Him. The Prophet ﷺ said, as narrated in Sunan Abī Dāwūd (authenticated by al-Albānī): “When Allah has decreed for a servant a rank which he cannot reach through his deeds, He afflicts him in his body, wealth, or children—then grants him patience until he attains that rank which He had decreed for him.”

So... O you whose trial is prolonged and whose relief is delayed: You do not know what goodness lies in your situation, nor do you know what benefit this trial may bring you. Perhaps you will emerge from it stronger, more knowledgeable, or far wiser than you were before.

This world is a place of trial. And if you looked at the situations of many others, your own trial might seem lighter, and you would thank Allah.

Factors that contribute to the spread of this doubt among some practicing Muslims include:

- Excessive idealism in imagining that *du'ā'* must always be answered immediately.
- Lack of proper Islamic understanding regarding the nature, wisdom, and jurisprudence of *du'ā'*.
- Blameworthy haste concerning worldly matters and their fulfillment.
- Weakness in patience when facing trials.
- Excessive softness and misplaced compassion toward those undergoing trials, leading to misplaced expectations about their *du'ā'*.



19. The Condition of Slaves in Islam

Among the emotional topics where ignorance of Islamic teachings can cause practicing Muslims to doubt or have their faith shaken are the doubts surrounding slavery, often falsely attributed to Islam. Many Muslims are surprisingly unfamiliar with the fiqh of slavery in Islam, despite having read the Qur'ān repeatedly. Thus, they are shocked and unsettled by these fabrications, as if they are encountering this subject for the very first time.

What is astonishing is that the images used to distort the concept of slavery in Islam are taken from the history of ancient civilizations—Romans, Pharaohs, and others—or from modern history in Europe and America, where they kidnapped Africans and the indigenous people of Australia, transporting them across the seas for forced labor under the worst forms of social oppression in modern times. Nearly one-third of them would die during the sea voyage due to horrific conditions and treatment. Those who survived were treated as mere property, abused sexually and physically without the slightest rights. This is what existed before Islam.

Now, when such imagery and video clips are presented to a Muslim, they naturally evoke vivid images of suffering, injustice, and violation... but the key question is: Was this truly the condition of slaves under Islam?

Let us apply our usual method of dismantling such doubts—by clarifying the opposite of what the accusation suggests and presenting the reality of how Islam addressed the issue.

First: Slavery—the enslavement of the weak by the strong, the victor over the vanquished, and the master by birth over the slave by birth—predated Islam and has existed both before and after its advent. Islam did not introduce slavery; rather, it was already a well-established reality of human conflict across history, whether through war, conquest, or even economic and political systems.



Even today, in the 21st century, there are forms of modern slavery and exploitation that receive barely a fraction of the media attention given to “Islamic slavery”—simply because they are not labeled explicitly as slavery.

What did Islam actually do?

Islam abolished more than 20 pre-Islamic causes of enslavement (such as raiding tribes, kidnapping, and capturing free people), where free men and women were suddenly turned into slaves overnight.

Islam restricted the only legitimate cause of slavery to prisoners of war captured during just and declared warfare between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Even then, Islam prescribed rights for those in this condition, as we will soon see.

So the question is: Can a religion that actively restricted the causes of slavery be fairly labeled as a religion that promotes the enslavement of people?

Second: Islam opened many pathways for granting freedom to slaves. These pathways were designed to operate gradually, not all at once, for political, military, and social reasons. Slaves required gradual integration into society and needed time to reshape the public view of them, from mere property to respected human beings⁽¹⁾.

Furthermore, the origin of most slaves after wars was that they were former enemies, and it was dangerous to free them all at once or to release large groups of them without preparation, which could have driven some men to theft or violence and some women to prostitution.

Additionally, Muslims sometimes needed to exchange prisoners with disbelievers using their captives.

(1) This gradual integration into society and transformation of perceptions highlights—far more clearly—the stark contrast between what Islam achieved when it elevated an Abyssinian slave like Bilāl or a freed black man like Usāmah ibn Zayd among the Muslims, and what Abraham Lincoln did more than a thousand years later in 1860 when he issued the order to emancipate the slaves—while he himself still viewed Black people (referred to at the time as “Negroes”) with full-blown racism and abhorrent favoritism toward the white race to which he belonged, even prohibiting their mixing with whites!

The enduring effects of this mindset are still evident today in the so-called civilized American society—in the form of police brutality and the persistent discrimination and contempt toward Black people.

Meanwhile, in Islam, former slaves and freedmen went on to become Companions of the Prophet, scholars, successors, leaders, and caliphs, as we will soon see.



As for the pathways of manumission, some were placed in the hands of the slave owners, while others were placed in the hands of the slaves themselves (both male and female). The term *amāh* refers to a female slave, and *ghulām* is sometimes used to describe a young male servant.

Allah encouraged manumission and made it one of the greatest acts of piety. He said, enumerating the deeds that help a person overcome their materialistic nature and advance on the path of goodness: **“But he has not attempted the uphill path. And what can make you know what the uphill path is? It is the freeing of a slave, or feeding on a day of severe hunger, an orphan of near relationship, or a needy person in misery. Then he becomes one of those who believe and enjoin one another to patience and enjoin one another to compassion.”** (*Sūrat al-Balad: 11–17*)

Moreover, the reward is even greater when the slave (male or female) embraces Islam after seeing the ethics, treatment, and monotheistic faith of the Muslims. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim reported in their *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, from Abū Hurayrah, that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever frees a believing slave, Allah will free with every limb of that slave a limb of his from the Fire—even the private parts for the private parts.”

Additionally, manumission of a slave is an expiation for:

- Breaking an oath.
- Accidentally killing a believer or an ally.
- The expiation for *zihār* (the statement of a man telling his wife, “You are to me as my mother’s back,” which was used to sever marital relations).
- The Prophet ﷺ added a fourth expiation: deliberately breaking the fast in Ramadan through intercourse.

Islam legislated a contract known as *mukātabah*, wherein a slave could negotiate with their master to purchase their freedom by paying a certain amount—either in money, produce, or similar means.

This was only permissible if the slave could realistically earn this amount through work or relationships, assuring society that they would be self-sufficient upon their release and would not resort to crime or corruption.

The master was obligated to allow them time to gather the amount. Even more remarkably, Allah made helping slaves fulfill this *mukātabah*—or even paying it entirely on their behalf—one of the eight categories of *zakāh* recipients: “Zakah expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect [zakāh] and for bringing hearts together [toward Islam] and for freeing captives (*fi al-riqāb*) and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the [stranded] traveler—an obligation [imposed] by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise.” (*Sūrat al-Tawbah: 60*)

The term *fi al-riqāb* here covers:

- Funding *mukātabah* contracts.
- Purchasing and freeing slaves directly.
- Ransoming Muslim prisoners from captivity or kidnapping.

Now consider this: What kind of religion is this—one that encourages manumission, makes it an expiation for sins, promotes it as one of the most righteous deeds, and even dedicates a specific category of zakāh funds toward freeing slaves—yet some still accuse it of promoting slavery?!

Third: Islam granted slaves rights that neither the Arabs nor any other nation had known, nor do we find them today in even the most “advanced” countries of the world regarding their workers, prisoners, or detainees.

Had the committed Muslim known these rights, such doubts would never have taken hold in his heart. Sadly, such as:

- **The right to dignity in speech**, even in how one addresses them.
- Al-Bukhārī reports in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “None of you should say: ‘Feed your lord (rabbak), light your lord’s lamp, give your lord water to drink,’ but rather say: ‘My master (sayyidī), my patron (mawlāyā).’ And let none of you say: ‘My slave (‘abdī), my slave-girl (amatī),’ but rather say: ‘My boy (fatāyā), my girl (fatātī), my servant (ghulāmī).’”
- Although the word rabbī here means “master” or “owner,” such a term was discouraged for reasons of dignity.
- **The prohibition of beating them.** Muslim reports in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* from Abū Mas‘ūd al-Anṣārī, who said: “I was beating a boy of mine (meaning a slave), when I heard a voice behind me say: ‘Know, Abū Mas‘ūd... know, Abū Mas‘ūd... Allah is more capable of overpowering you than you are over him!’ I turned, and it was the Prophet ﷺ. I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, he is now free for the sake of Allah.’ The Prophet ﷺ said: ‘Had you not done so, the Fire would have scorched you.’”
- **The right to food and clothing is equal to that of his master**, exactly and fully.
- Muslim reports in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “The slave is entitled to his food and clothing, and is not to be burdened with work beyond his capacity.”

And lest this remain theoretical without practical application, consider the following real example: Some people once entered upon Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī and found him wearing a burd (a fine cloak), and his servant (meaning his slave) was wearing the same.



They said in amazement: “O Abū Dharr, if you had taken your servant’s cloak and combined it with yours, it would have made a full outfit, and then you could have clothed him with something else!”

Abū Dharr replied to them: “I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say: ‘Your brothers—whom Allah has placed under your authority—are your brothers. So whoever has his brother under his authority, let him feed him from what he eats and clothe him from what he wears. And do not burden him with what he cannot bear. But if you do burden him, then help him (in the task).⁽¹⁾’”

- **The right to marriage** for either the male or female slave if either one requests it from their master. Some discussion on this will follow in the next section regarding the topic of *possessions by the right hand* (mā malakat aymānukum) in Islam and the rights and entitlements of such women.
- **The right of full emancipation** is that if a deceased person leaves behind a slave whose ownership is divided among multiple heirs, and one of them emancipates his share of the slave, then the others are also obliged to emancipate him entirely.

And were it not for fear of making this too lengthy, I would have expanded greatly on the practical reality of the condition of slaves and freedmen in Islam—and the fruitful outcomes of these wise legislations, which granted rights to slaves and clients (the *mawlā* here refers to a freed slave who remained attached to his master’s household and family, remaining loyal to them or serving them), rights unseen by humanity before or since.

But I will leave room now for the next topic related to this matter:

(1) Narrated by Abū Dāwūd in his *Sunan*, authenticated by Al-Albānī, and it also has a corroborating narration in Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.



20. The Status of Those Whom Your Right Hands Possess in Islam

The same kinds of doubts—designed to stir the emotions of committed Muslims—that were spread about slaves in general are repeated with the same psychological tactics regarding the issue of *female captives* in Islam, known as *Mā Malakat Aymānukum* (those whom one's right hand possesses).

A *Mā Malakat Aymānukum*—or *surriyah*—is a female slave with whom her master may have marital relations with her consent, and she enjoys rights which we will mention shortly.

What exacerbates the problem is that this topic is often accompanied by a flood of images from the European colonial era, showing naked women to encourage European men to enlist in colonial armies, as if this represented the true situation of such women in homes and palaces⁽¹⁾.

(1) There was an excellent report on this topic by the ORIAS institute at the University of California, Berkeley, in a series of lectures from July 25–29, 2011. It explained the real purpose behind these images and how they were used to implant this concept in the minds of Westerners—even how they infiltrated Western cinema. The report also highlighted the true and high status of women in many Asian and Islamic societies, including their historical roles in governance and public consultation.

Here is the downloadable PDF of the summary by Dr. Leslie Ann Woodhouse:

orias.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2011-woodhouse-summary.pdf

Title: Absent Voices: Experience of Common Life in World History — Comparative Harems: Women, Sex, and Family Structures from the Middle East to South & Southeast Asia.



Real photographs were also staged of naked girls and women, not taken in the Muslim world, but in European brothels and studios, or in certain brothels set up in parts of the Arab world⁽¹⁾.

What is most striking here is the massive contradiction between what these images suggest and what is known about Islam to anyone with the slightest amount of rational reflection. One such image even shows an old man with a white beard performing *wuḍū'* while a completely naked young girl supposedly pours water for him, her clothes lying on the floor as if just removed for the photoshoot!

Would Muslim men photograph their women in such a way? On what religious basis could such an act possibly be justified—if it were even authentic? It is contradiction upon contradiction.

Before mentioning some of the many legal and moral facts that are so often concealed—just as we did earlier in clarifying the reality of slaves in Islam—let us first take a quick tour of how defeated women are treated in times of war (and even in times of general disaster) by those outside of Islam, especially those who trumpet modernity and so-called human rights.

Notice: I will not mention examples from thousands of years ago, nor from the era of Islam 1400 years ago—but examples from our own modern times, sadly:

- In March 2015, a book was published entitled *When The Soldiers Came* by the German author Miriam Gebhardt. It presented shocking documented figures about the largest mass rape crimes in history, which occurred during World War II against German women—860,000 individual and gang rapes of women, girls, and even elderly women.

The book also shattered the previous narrative that only Soviet soldiers committed these rapes—American, French, and British soldiers also perpetrated them!⁽²⁾

And it was not limited to the defeated German women at the hands of the Allies. American soldiers even raped French women (even though France was one of America's allies in that same war!). They also committed sexual assaults against men and children. So how does Islam compare with this?

(1) Many cases of this moral fraud were documented by the Algerian writer Malek Alloula (himself a secularist), who was deeply disturbed by the spread of these fabricated images about the women of his own country. He authored a book originally in French entitled *Le Harem Colonial (The Colonial Harem)*, translated into English as *The Colonial Harem*, translated by Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich, with an introduction by Barbara Harlow.

Note: the book includes some explicit images as examples of this deceit, so caution is advised.

(2) One of the many articles covering this report: Allies raped almost 1m Germans: academic

www.thelocal.de/20150305/book-world-war-ii-allied-soldiers-raped-nearly-1mil-germans



- I have deliberately chosen this single example, as it combines the actions of multiple “civilized” Western nations in a single war. Were I to mention more, there would be no end.

I have not even begun to mention the atrocities committed against Muslims in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, including mass rapes unto death, rapes in prisons and detention centers, and the trafficking of women and girls for prostitution during wartime in Asia and Africa.

- A woman remains vulnerable, no matter how much advocates of “women’s rights” and “equality with men” may exaggerate their slogans. This vulnerability becomes most evident during times of war and disaster. Without a guiding message from the true God, there is no law, code, or charter—nor even humanitarian services or international organizations—that will truly protect her! Can you imagine?
- I will not prolong this point either, in line with my earlier promise not to be lengthy. I will suffice with just two recent reports to clearly highlight the hypocrisy of those who attack the purity of Islam and its respect for women—even within the context of slavery and *Mā Malakat Aymānukum* (as we will soon see)—while ignoring the true origins of human depravity outside of Islam!
- In mid-February 2018 (while I was completing the final touches on this book), the world’s newspapers were shaken by a massive scandal: United Nations (UN) aid workers had been implicated in 60,000 cases of rape in just 10 years! (Once again: only 10 years!)(¹)
- The shock of this major scandal coincided with another major case involving one of the UK’s most prominent humanitarian organizations, *Oxfam*, which receives \$44 million annually in government funding and brings together some 19 charities under its umbrella. The scandal: When Oxfam participated in humanitarian aid efforts after the devastating Haiti earthquake of 2010, its workers exploited the dire conditions of Haitian women—subjecting them to sexual exploitation for their own gratification or recruiting them into prostitution in exchange for money!(²)
- Even children and minors were used as sex workers. The most appalling part? One Oxfam employee stated that such practices are common in disaster zones.

For more details in Arabic—and many more related reports about such crimes by humanitarian organizations and peacekeeping forces—you can search with headlines like: “The Times: UN

(1) Headline from *The Times* (UK): Charity sex scandal: UN staff ‘responsible for 60,000 rapes in a decade’

www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/un-staff-responsible-for-60-000-rares-in-a-decade-c627rx239

(2) Headline from *The Washington Post*: Oxfam crisis spreads as Haiti suggests aid workers exploited children for sex

www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/02/11/oxfam-could-lose-funding-over-allegations-that-it-exploited-disaster-victims-for-sex/?utm_term=.9e6da2bc6c92



workers ‘responsible for 60,000 rapes in a decade’,” published on BBC Arabic, which also links to other similar and related articles.

In conclusion, I believe this introduction is more than sufficient to show the vast gulf between this grim reality and the pure, upright example of Islam, which is being deliberately distorted today. Those who spread such doubts intentionally replace the Islamic terms *Mā Malakat Aymānukum* and *surriyah* with the word *rape*, precisely to manipulate emotions and undermine the faith of committed Muslims.

But here is the question:

Can they bring even one authentic hadith, or even a single historical report—even if weak, fabricated, or outright false—showing that a Muslim or a Companion ever forced a female slave into sexual relations as part of *Mā Malakat Aymānukum*?

They will not find a single one. Can you imagine that?

And by Allah, what we will mention next will make any rational person say: “If a war were to break out and we were defeated, with our women falling into the hands of the enemy—I would hope that our captors would be Muslims!”

- The first surprising fact here is that if a man and his wife fall into captivity or slavery, they are not separated; rather, they remain together (along with their children, if they have any). Is this the conduct of rapists?
- The second surprising fact is that not all women who fall into captivity or slavery become *Mā Malakat Aymānukum* (those whom the right hand possesses) or *surriyāt* (concubines). Some are older in age, not desirable, or otherwise unsuitable. The primary role of slavery in Islam was work and service (this was the social role of slavery in Islam), and a woman does not become a concubine except with her consent. If she does not want that, on what basis would she be forced?
- Even more astonishing is that Islam requires that a female captive who was previously married must not be approached by her master until she is cleared of pregnancy (i.e., they must wait until she menstruates once or twice to ensure she is not pregnant). If she is already pregnant, he must wait until she gives birth before having any relations with her.

This is based on what Abū Dāwūd reported in his Sunan (authenticated by Al-Albānī), where the Prophet ﷺ said: “It is not permissible for a man who believes in Allah and the Last Day to irrigate what another has planted (i.e., to have intercourse with a pregnant woman), nor is it permissible for a man who believes in Allah and the Last Day to have intercourse with a captive woman until she has been cleared of pregnancy.”



And here is the question: Is this the behavior of rapists, who assault women, exploiting their weakness and the death or absence of their families? Is this the behavior of those driven by base lusts, blinded by their desires? Have you ever heard of any nation that imposed such conditions out of respect for the humanity of women, even in the context of slavery, as Islam did?

- Moreover, rather than keeping families in lifelong slavery for generation after generation (as was the case in nations outside Islam), a concubine (*surriyah*) who bears a child for her master gives birth to a free child, and she herself becomes free (an *Umm Walad*) after her master's death—unless he frees her sooner. If a free man marries a female slave, he may stipulate with her master that any children they have together will be born free.
- The wisdom behind allowing *Mā Malakat Aymānukum* and *tasarrī* is manifold. Among the purposes:
 - Protecting captive women in need of it.
 - Establishing affection, intimacy, integration, and eventual manumission.
 - Facilitating closer acquaintance with Islam, with the hope that the non-Muslim woman might embrace Islam.
 - Providing lawful protection for Muslim men and youths, particularly when there are women from among prisoners of war in their households, or when a man is unable to marry. Thus, their relationship is regulated by a known and lawful framework that Allah allowed—rather than becoming a savage, unregulated relationship where any man, his sons, or his friends could violate the woman, leaving her not even knowing who fathered her child!
- It is strictly prohibited in the Muslim community—for anyone, Muslim or otherwise—to exploit female slaves for prostitution, fornication, or sexual exploitation. If a woman is forced into such acts, she bears no sin whatsoever.
- Compare this to today's reality of white slavery and sexual slavery in Asia, Europe, America, and Israel, where kidnapped, poor, or runaway girls and women from war zones and elsewhere are forced into prostitution through threats and coercion, with the complicity of corrupt government officials and law enforcement, who turn a blind eye in exchange for money and favors.
- Allah says: **“But do not compel your slave girls to prostitution if they desire chastity, seeking thereby the goods of worldly life. But if someone should compel them, then indeed, Allah is forgiving and merciful to them after such compulsion.”** (*Sūrat al-Nūr: 33*)

And the question: Is this the conduct of Muslims supposedly “thirsty for sex” and “raping women” (whether captives or *Mā Malakat Aymānukum* or *surriyāt*)?!



- A master is also allowed to marry off his female slave to a suitable and accepted man—whether he is a slave or a free man—as Allah says: **“And marry off those who are single among you and those who are righteous among your male and female slaves.”** (*Sūrat al-Nūr*: 32)
- Allah even stated that marrying a believing female slave is better than marrying a free polytheist woman. Allah says: **“And do not marry polytheist women until they believe. A believing slave woman is better than a polytheist woman, even though she might please you.”** (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*: 221)
- Allah also said: **“And whoever among you cannot afford to marry free believing women, then marry from those whom your right hands possess—of believing girls. And Allah knows best about your faith. You are one from another. So marry them with the permission of their families, and give them their due dowries according to what is acceptable.”** (*Sūrat al-Nisā*’: 25)
- Islam even went further to account for the psychological needs and feelings of a woman who gains her freedom while her husband remains a slave. It allowed her the right to separate from him if she chose.

This was the case with Barīrah, who was a slave woman while her husband, Mughīth, was a slave. When she pursued her manumission and received help from our mother ‘Ā’ishah, and was freed, she then chose to separate from her husband. Mughīth appealed to the Prophet ﷺ to intercede with her, and Barīrah asked the Prophet ﷺ, as reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*: “O Messenger of Allah, is this an order from you?”—meaning, is this a religious command I must obey? He replied: “No, I am only interceding.” She then said, “I have no need for him.” Can you imagine this? A woman, newly freed, barely tasting her first breaths of liberty, is approached by the Prophet of the ummah, the most honored and revered person in her society and religion—and he intercedes without ordering or pressuring her. Yet she confidently declines his intercession!

Is there any more powerful example of Islam’s affirmation of women’s rights and dignity—even in the context of former slavery? And if this is how Islam treated female slaves, what then of the Muslim free woman: mother, sister, daughter, or wife?⁽¹⁾

- From the case of Barīrah mentioned earlier, we also derive another important legal ruling: the marriage between a slave man and a slave woman does not automatically dissolve simply because one of them attains freedom. Their marriage remains valid during slavery and after

(1) Just for clarification: a Muslim woman cannot be forced into marriage—her marriage is not valid without her explicit consent. Likewise, if she was married while young or under coercion, and once she matures she wishes to separate, she has the right to request this from the Muslim judge. Also, if she marries but later finds harm in remaining with her husband, she may seek khul’ (divorce initiated by the wife), returning the dowry or any amount agreed upon to the husband. Is this the way of a religion that oppresses women—or one that honors them and their individuality?



one of them is freed—unless they themselves mutually choose otherwise, as in the case of Barīrah, and not through compulsion by any third party.

- In support of this non-compulsion in dissolving a marriage in slavery, Ibn Mājah narrated in his *Sunan* (graded *ḥasan* by Al-Albānī) that a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: “O Messenger of Allah, my master married me to his slave woman, and now he wants to separate us.” So the Prophet ﷺ ascended the pulpit and said: “O people! Why does one of you marry off his slave to his slave woman, and then seek to separate them? Verily, divorce belongs to the one who holds the leg [i.e., the husband].”
- As for the well-known doubts surrounding the *ḥijāb* and *‘awrah* of slave women, I will keep the discussion focused and mention only three main points often raised in this context.

First doubt: It is based on the ḥadīth narrated by Abū Dāwūd and others: “If one of you marries off his slave, female slave, or employee, he must not look at anything of their *‘awrah*. What is below the navel to the knees is *‘awrah*.” Shaykh Al-Albānī declared this narration weak⁽¹⁾.

However, let us assume it is authentic, as some scholars have done due to not recognizing its weakness. How did they understand this narration?

There are two interpretations:

One group understood that the master is prohibited from looking at the *‘awrah* of his male or female slave, which they defined as between the navel and the knees. They reasoned that the meaning refers to what may naturally become visible during work in the home, just as happens with our mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters. But they did not understand this narration to mean that slave women walked the streets with exposed chests—this is a distorted and unreasonable reading. Neither any Muslim nor any non-Muslim historian ever recorded such a phenomenon, just as we do not interpret the statement that a man’s *‘awrah* is from the navel to the knees to mean that Muslim men walked around public streets dressed only in that.

The other group, whose view is more correct, understood the opposite: that the prohibition of gaze here refers not to the master, but to the slave woman looking at the *‘awrah* of her master. Supporting this interpretation is a clearer version of the narration reported by Al-Naḍr ibn Shumayl from Abū Ḥamzah al-Ṣayrafī (Suwār ibn Dāwūd), which reads: “If one of you marries off his male or female slave or his employee, then the female slave must not look at anything of his *‘awrah*, for what is beneath the navel to the knees is *‘awrah*.”

This was recorded by Al-Dāraqutnī and later by Al-Bayhaqī. Shaykh Al-Albānī commented on this in *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa‘īfah wa-al-Mawḍū‘ah*, saying: “This version—unlike the previous

(1) See: *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa‘īfah wa-al-Mawḍū‘ah*, Volume 2, page 455.



ones—explicitly states that the one prohibited from looking is the female slave, and that the pronoun in ‘his ‘awrah’ refers to ‘one of you’ [i.e., the master].”

Second doubt: It concerns the fact that a free Muslim woman is obligated to wear *ḥijāb* and cover her hair, whereas a slave woman is not obligated to do so. This view is derived from Qur’anic exegesis of the verses on *ḥijāb* in *Sūrat al-Nūr* and *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, as well as from the actions of the Commander of the Believers, ‘Umar al-Fārūq.

To understand this issue and close the door on manipulation and misrepresentation, it is crucial to consider both the religious and social context: From the perspective of labor and household duties, this was a concession given to slave women, just as we see our mothers and sisters finding difficulty maintaining full *ḥijāb* during work.

From another perspective, this distinction reflects the lesser religious commitment often observed in slave women, especially those who were not Muslim or came from other cultures. Since immoral individuals would target such women more freely if they dressed exactly like free Muslim women, this would lead to confusion and harassment of chaste Muslim women too—something that would promote social corruption. This was the rationale behind ‘Umar’s prohibition of slave women dressing like free women in public.

And the question is: What if the *amah* (female slave) was beautiful? Is it conceivable that Islam — which commanded the woman to wear the *ḥijāb* and instructed men to lower their gaze, as Allah said: “**Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity...**” (*Sūrat al-Nūr*: 30) — would then bring something that completely contradicts all of that? Certainly not. The correct view is: if the *amah* is not beautiful or desirable — as is the case with most women involved in laborious work and menial service — then there is no sin if she lightens her *ḥijāb*. But if she is beautiful and likely to arouse desire, then by Allah, such leniency does not apply.

Ibn al-Qayyim was amazed at this contradiction, and said — pointing to how Allah allowed elderly women who are no longer desired to ease their *ḥijāb* in *Sūrat al-Nūr*: “As for claiming that it is forbidden to look at an elderly, disfigured, unattractive free woman, but allowed to look at a strikingly beautiful *amah* — this is a lie against the Lawgiver. Where did Allah prohibit this and permit that? Allah only said: ‘Tell the believing men to lower their gaze...’ Allah and His Messenger did not grant license for eyes to gaze at beautiful *amā*’. And if one fears temptation from looking at a female slave, then it is undoubtedly prohibited.⁽¹⁾”

(1) *I’lām al-Muwaqqi’in ‘an Rabb al-‘Ālamīn* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Volume 2, Chapter 5: Ruling on Looking at the Free Woman and at the Female Slave.



Third doubt: The claim that ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar used to physically inspect a *jāriyah* (slave girl) with his hands before purchasing her, and that some permitted this as long as it was done with the intention of buying, to verify her health or suitability for concubinage.

Let us first say: anyone who truly knows the life of Ibn ‘Umar and his upright character, and how he imbibed the modesty and manners of the Prophet ﷺ, would never accept such a report as easily as someone ignorant of him. And anyone who knows the deep sense of protective honor of ‘Umar al-Fārūq would also hesitate to believe such a thing.

Al-Bayhaqī reported through his chain from Ibn Numayr from ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Umar from Nāfi’ from Ibn ‘Umar that he used to — when buying a slave girl — uncover her leg and place his hand between her breasts and on her rear. It seemed he did so from behind a garment.

However, this narration was mistakenly authenticated by Shaykh al-Albānī, as he did not note that Ibn Numayr never met ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Umar. In fact, Ibn Numayr was born after his death by 13–15 years. Ibn Numayr was born after 160 AH⁽¹⁾, while ‘Ubayd Allāh died in either 145 or 147 AH⁽²⁾. This makes the chain disconnected and invalid for evidence. Furthermore, even the other versions of this narration are all flawed. I will not track each one here, as this book is not the proper place for such a detailed critique⁽³⁾.

Thus, the most famous misconceptions about *imā’* and concubinage in Islam fall apart. And since Muslims have long entered into multiple international treaties and conventions with other nations banning slavery — at least officially — we clearly see the massive disconnect between the lies fabricated about Islam and the actual historical and current reality of Muslims.

Let me conclude here by mentioning just a few well-known examples of individuals who were either slaves, children of concubines, or *mawālī* (freed slaves), so you may reflect on how Islam’s legislation led to their true integration and practical acceptance in society.

(1) See: *Siyar A’lām al-Nubalā’* by Imām al-Dhahabī, Twelfth Tabaqah (Generation), under the entry for Ibn Numayr.

(2) See: *Siyar A’lām al-Nubalā’* by Imām al-Dhahabī, Fifth Tabaqah (Generation), under the entry for ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Umar.

(3) Strangely enough, this practice of slave traders — “the dealers of slaves” — in nations before and after Islam involved displaying certain slaves, male and female, nearly nude, with only the private parts covered, for all to inspect. Even until recently, such markets were operated in remote regions, including in parts of Saudi Arabia near the African coasts, where specialized networks would exploit the poverty of some Africans or kidnap their children and youth to sell them. One Western documentary tracked down one of these markets and filmed segments (video footage) from it. Some atheists then extracted that portion to make it appear as if this was an officially recognized slave market in Saudi Arabia — while in truth, these traders operated covertly, just like illicit brothels and prostitution houses.



Among the Companions: Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, Salmān al-Fārisī, Zayd ibn Ḥārithah and his son Usāmah ibn Zayd, and Sālim, the freed slave of Abū Ḥudhayfah — may Allah be pleased with them all.

And among the scholars and Tābiʿīn: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī – ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ – Nāfi’, the freedman of Ibn ‘Umar – Makḥūl – Yazīd ibn Ḥabīb.

Among the military commanders: Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, Abū al-Muhājir Dīnār, Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim, Muḥammad ibn Yazīd.

Among the caliphs: Al-Ma’mūn, son of Hārūn al-Rashīd, whose mother was Marājil – Al-Mu’taṣim billāh, also son of Hārūn al-Rashīd, whose mother was Mārdah – Al-Mutawakkil, whose mother was Shujā’ – Al-Muktafī billāh, whose mother was Jījīk Khātūn – Al-Muqtadir billāh, whose mother was Shaghab – Al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh, whose mother was Zumurrudah – Al-Mustaṣir billāh al-Ẓāhir, whose mother was Tūrk Khātūn – Al-Mustaʿīn billāh, son of al-Mutawakkil, whose mother was Bāy Khātūn.

From all the aforementioned examples related to slaves in general and concubines in particular, it becomes clear that the persistence of doubts about this topic is often fueled by:

- Excessive idealism that overlooks the harsh realities and devastations of war.
- A lack of proper religious and historical knowledge concerning the rulings on slavery and the rights and conditions of slaves in Islam.
- The assumption—due to the abundance of doubts raised about Islam—that Islam is the originator of slavery.
- Comparing the historical Islamic reality with the brutal, bloody record of slavery portrayed in media and non-Islamic histories.
- The hasty inclination to believe such doubts, despite their contradiction to the chastity and purity of Islam.



21. The Muslim Woman and Moments of Doubt

In contrast to the previous two topics—which were explained in detail due to the scarcity of speakers on them and the widespread ignorance surrounding them—here I will be brief regarding women’s issues in relation to the problem of evil. This is because: On the one hand, women’s issues have become among the most widely discussed topics in modern times, used to attack Islam. Consequently, there are now numerous accessible responses to these doubts—even for non-specialists, let alone committed Muslim women.

On the other hand, most of the situations that might cause a committed Muslim woman to doubt her religion fall under the twenty issues already covered or those that will follow. These are shared challenges, not exclusive to men or women. They range from suffering under a tyrannical husband or a harsh family, to illness or other hardships, and extend to themes such as compassion, supplication, and more.

Therefore, I will limit this section to a few key points I have practically observed through personal conversations with committed Muslim women who experienced doubts due to certain matters:

First: Shock from a role model—when a committed Muslim woman is wronged by another Muslim (or Muslims) whom she presumed to be knowledgeable, righteous, and devout. Here, it is vital to warn against the mistake of overgeneralization, as we noted earlier.

Second: Certain disputed legal issues where some jurists or blind followers rigidly adhere to a particular opinion, portraying it as the absolute truth and all others as false. This ends up closing doors that could have otherwise accommodated the diverse realities and circumstances of different women and societies. The solution lies in the committed woman’s pursuit of genuine religious knowledge and its foundations, which would enable her to distinguish between issues open to valid difference of opinion and those not.



Third: A committed Muslim woman may at times experience spiritual weakness when observing non-practicing women who appear to be living happy, ideal lives. In my view, this can be addressed in three ways:

1. Internalizing belief in the reward of the hereafter for the pious and righteous, remembering that what is with Allah is better and everlasting.
2. If the cause of her feelings of inadequacy stems from a trial she faces or one her family members endures—such as delayed marriage, a harsh spouse, infertility, or a child born with a disability or mental condition that brings her psychological pain among her peers—then she should look around at others who face similar or worse afflictions and yet remain patient and socially engaged. Many among them may be less devout or less knowledgeable, yet they endure and persist. She should also remember the wisdom behind trials and the delays in answered supplication, as mentioned earlier, and recall the trials of righteous women such as Āsiyah, the wife of Pharaoh, and Maryam, and others like them.
3. She should be firmly certain that no woman (or man) in the world is free of trials or disruptions to peace. This life was never meant to be a paradise, as we've said before. In fact, the lives of non-Muslims and non-practicing individuals are, in truth, often more constricted and miserable than they appear on screens and social media. If that is the case, then what of those who have chosen a life of moral decay and abandonment of religious, ethical, and modest values? Statistics today—praise be to Allah—are easily accessible online and reveal the other side that the promoters of moral corruption and lust in our societies hide. The more our Muslim societies are distorted to resemble Western ones, the more we see the rise of their afflictions among us—afflictions the media conceals but that burden women far more than men⁽¹⁾.

Fourth: The difference between the condition of women in the past and the present makes some of the expressions used by exegetes and jurists in their books seem disparaging toward women, such as grouping them with children or the feeble-minded in the same statements. While such comparisons are incorrect in meaning and should not be generalized to all scholars (many of whom clarified the sound reasoning of women, especially when specialized in a field they

(1) As a point of variation—and while most statistics highlight the suffering of women in America—I will suffice with just one report from Europe: a statement released by the *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights* in 2014 titled “Violence against Women: Every Day and Everywhere”, which documents physical and sexual assaults against women starting from the age of 15. Link:

fra.europa.eu/en/press-release/2014/violence-against-women-every-day-and-everywhere



excel in like trade)⁽¹⁾, in our present age—with the expansion of education and easy access to all types of knowledge and information with just a few keyboard clicks—such expressions must be re-evaluated. There is no harm in saying that a particular scholar’s statement was unfair toward women or mistaken. No scholar is infallible, and since scholars may err even in greater matters, refusing to acknowledge a mistake in this context becomes a form of obstinacy.

Fifth: It is essential to distinguish between erroneous societal practices and cultural customs that Islam does not approve of, and between the actual teachings of Islam in the Qur’an and Sunnah. Confusing the two leads to attributing harmful practices to Islam, when in reality they are the byproduct of certain societies. Perhaps the most well-known example is the injustice faced by Muslim women in matters of inheritance—whether through reducing her share, withholding it entirely, or giving it while forcing her to marry within the family, and so on. Therefore, a proper distinction must be made, which depends on the woman learning her religion and knowing how to defend her rights, including by appealing to authorities or a judge if dialogue and advice with her family fail.

Sixth: Some of today’s problems faced by women—including devout ones—stem from a denial of the natural differences between men and women. These include differences in thought processes, experience in dealing with people, and inherent physical and emotional distinctions. Ignoring these differences leads to many difficult experiences both inside and outside the home. Yet the Sharī’ah of Allah and His Messenger—the most merciful to her, even more than she is to herself—has clearly identified these differences for both men and women, so that each may interact with the other accordingly. Just as the best women are those who treat men as men—recognizing their differences—so too are the best men those who treat women as women, not as equals to men. They show gentleness toward their deep emotions, overlook certain lapses or forgetfulness, or a lack of attention that some women or wives may struggle with for reasons beyond their control. They do not assume such behavior is intentional, careless, or negligent. These are the very same causes that fuel tension between men and women, whether in Muslim countries or abroad. But the problems abroad are far worse, due to the absence of religious

(1) An example of this is the words of Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah and his student Ibn al-Qayyim—may Allah have mercy on them both—regarding the matter of a woman’s testimony being counted as half that of a man. They clarified that this applies only in specific cases, not universally. For example, a woman narrating a hadīth is considered a single narrator, just like a man—this is a form of testimony. Similarly, a judge may accept the testimony of a single woman in matters related to women, such as virginity, breastfeeding, menstruation, and similar issues, because women are more knowledgeable about them. As long as her testimony is supported by contextual indicators, the judge may accept it—even in commercial matters—if she is not ignorant of them and is familiar with financial dealings, which most women tend to avoid.



guidelines and ethical instructions like those found in Islam. Thus, the further we drift from Islam, the closer we come to the problems of the West.

Seventh and finally: A devout Muslim woman should set for herself multiple goals in life and not confine her life or concerns to a single matter. For if she suffers a setback in that one area, she will likely experience emotional turmoil and psychological instability (such as a delay in marriage, a failed marriage, divorce, or widowhood, etc.). She should set goals between herself and Allah, between herself and her own soul, and establish both short-term and long-term objectives. And so on.

I will stop here on this matter to avoid undue length, as what might be added afterward could be covered in other contexts, as previously mentioned.

Among the most common factors that cause devout women to be affected by these issues are:

- Unrealistic ideals and expecting a life without problems or discomforts.
- Lack of proper religious knowledge about her rights and faith.
- Hastily generalizing the oppression she faces as a representative of Islam as a whole.
- Following some of the claims of equality with men in areas where it is impermissible.
- Moments of emotional weakness that make one more vulnerable to doubts than at any other time.



22. The Despair of Some Righteous People

When a committed Muslim forgets that the people around him—whether devout, non-devout, or even disbelievers—are his capital in doing good, moments may come where he feels lonely on this path and burdened by its hardships. He may feel despair at the poor behavior or harmful actions of other devout Muslims, or grief at the indifference of non-practicing Muslims, or even feel shaken by the turning away and sheer number of disbelievers. Instead of viewing these realities as opportunities to multiply avenues of reward, da‘wah, and righteous action, he begins to see them as signs of lost hope and a collapsing will to continue striving.

Glory be to Allah—the outcome will always be what He has decreed. You are not responsible alone for the misguidance of the misguided, just as you are not solely responsible for the guidance of those who are rightly guided. You are merely a means in either case. So ask yourself: what will you present to Allah that He will hold you accountable for?

A wise merchant is happy when his customers increase and their need for him grows—after all, they are his capital. But the weak of heart become bored or tired (and might even flee) when his customers increase, or he may abandon the trade entirely!

The scholars and righteous people of this Ummah noticed this emotional state that afflicts some devout Muslims (and at times even some callers to Islam and scholars themselves). So they wrote about it and sought ways out of it following the path of the Messenger ﷺ and his companions.

So, if that is the case, know that the first affliction is: Hastiness.

Seeking immediate results cuts short a Muslim’s resolve and weakens it. Hastening results may also be a sign of inner weakness—or even, Allah forbid, insincerity.

Let us return to the same hadith we cited earlier, but this time in full, emphasizing its ending. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, from Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: “We



complained to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ while he was reclining on his cloak in the shade of the Ka'bah (this was during the early years of persecution in Makkah). We said, 'Will you not seek help for us? Will you not supplicate to Allah for us?'

He said: 'Among those who came before you, a man would be seized, a pit dug for him in the ground, he would be placed in it, and a saw would be brought and placed on his head, splitting him in two—yet that would not turn him away from his religion. Or he would be combed with iron combs, removing flesh from bone and nerve—yet that would not turn him away from his religion.'

By Allah, this matter (Islam) will be completed such that a rider will travel from Ṣan'ā' to Ḥaḍramawt fearing none but Allah—and the wolf for his sheep. But you are hasty.'"

It is astonishing that alongside this hastiness, we sometimes see negligence among people of truth, while among people of falsehood, we see tireless effort and persistence in promoting their misguidance! And how true is what 'Umar al-Fārūq is famously reported to have said: "O Allah, I seek refuge in You from the resilience of the wicked and the weakness of the trustworthy!"

The second affliction, as previously noted, is: The Scarcity of the Guided.

That feeling of alienation in doing righteous work due to the abundance of the misguided and the scarcity of those rightly guided. If the devout Muslim, scholar, or da'ī (caller to Islam) truly understood the essence of his mission, he would realize that he is working for himself first, before he works for the guidance of others. He purifies his own faith by inviting others to faith. He purifies his knowledge by teaching it to others. And in the end, if he fulfills what is required of him, then the misguidance of people—even if all are misguided—will not harm him. This is not his responsibility. "You are not a controller over them."

Allah says: **"O you who believe! Take care of your own selves. If you follow the right guidance, those who go astray cannot harm you. To Allah is your return altogether; then He will inform you of what you used to do."** (*Sūrat al-Mā'idah*: 105).

A Muslim absolves himself before Allah by fulfilling his duty of sincere advice, glad tidings, and warnings to the people. This makes him blameless before Allah—he did what he could.

Just like those who advised the transgressors among the Children of Israel who violated the Sabbath. The people said to them: **"Why do you preach to a people whom Allah is about to destroy or punish with a severe punishment?"** (*Sūrat al-A'rāf*: 164).

And what was their response? **"To be absolved before your Lord, and perhaps they may fear Him."** (*Sūrat al-A'rāf*: 164).



Amazingly, even the best callers to humanity—the prophets—did not stop their efforts due to the small number of followers. In the well-known hadith of the Prophet ﷺ describing the nations, as found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, he said: “Nations were presented to me. I saw a prophet with a small group, and a prophet with one or two men, and a prophet with no one at all!”

Notice the use of the word “nations”, then how he mentions “a few men,” or “none at all”!

How can we be surprised when the Messenger of Allah ﷺ clearly foretold the trials and hardships the best of Muslims would face amidst tribulations and among others? Did he ﷺ not say—as narrated by al-Tirmidhī and authenticated by Al-Albānī: “A time will come upon the people when the one who is patient upon his religion will be like one holding onto a burning coal.”

For this reason, Ibn al-Qayyim—may Allah have mercy on him—narrates from the early righteous generations: “Adhere to the path of truth and do not feel lonely due to the few who tread it; and beware of the path of falsehood and do not be deceived by the multitude of those ruined upon it.”

He comments on this saying: “Whenever you feel alienated in your solitude, look to your forerunners—your righteous companions—and strive to join them. Turn your gaze away from others, for they will avail you nothing with Allah. And if they call out to you while you walk your path, do not turn to them—for if you do, they will seize you and obstruct you. ⁽¹⁾”

Thus, the scarcity of rightly guided people strikes deep within the self in two ways:

- It distracts the soul and pulls it toward them, potentially leading it astray.
- It causes a tender pity and compassion for them, which may lead to discontent with divine decree and even despair—as if the person is responsible for guiding others, while Allah says: **“Indeed, you do not guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He is most knowing of the rightly guided.”** (*Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*: 56)

From this, we can highlight some factors that influence this issue, such as:

- Excessive idealism in assuming that everyone who sees the truth must be guided.
- Overwhelming emotional compassion for the misguided.
- Hastening to see results from one’s efforts and da‘wah, leading to despair when outcomes are delayed.
- The most compassionate person toward humanity was the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, yet Allah said to him: **“Perhaps you would destroy yourself with grief because they will not be believers.”** (*Sūrat al-Shu‘arā’*: 3).

And He also said: **“So let not your soul waste away in regrets over them. Indeed, Allah is knowing of what they do.”** (*Sūrat Fāṭir*: 8).

(1) *Madārij al-Sālikīn* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1/21), Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah edition, Beirut.



23. Being Affected by the Weaknesses and Divisions Among Muslims

Faith remains a spiritual nourishment that never runs dry. However, when some people—often due to ignorance—begin to focus solely on the painful worldly state of the Muslim Ummah today, their overemphasis on material setbacks begins to affect even outwardly practicing individuals. Their idealistic view assumes that success and prosperity must *always* accompany the Muslims—at all times and under all conditions. So when they are exposed to doubts that challenge this notion—doubts that are now easily accessible through media and social networks—they can unfortunately shake those with weak knowledge.

This is a vast topic, but I will try to highlight the most critical points I've encountered:

First: Being affected by the divisions among Muslims into sects, each attacking the other, whether on the level of intellectual, scholarly discourse, or through physical armed conflicts and wars. To understand the reasons behind this, we briefly say: Not everyone who declares the two testimonies (shahādatayn) is truly Muslim. There are hypocrites among us, working to distort and destroy Islam, just as was done with Judaism and Christianity before us.

Allah describes one of the signs of such people, saying: **“When the hypocrites come to you [O Prophet], they say: ‘We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah.’ Allah knows that you are His Messenger, but Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars.”** (*Sūrat al-Munāfiqūn: 1*).

Just as the hypocrite Paul entered Christianity and distorted the doctrine of tawḥīd, claiming the divinity of ʿĪsā and inventing the Trinity, there are many among the Muslims who play similar roles today.

Islam is not a magical faith—it is a test like any other by which Allah tries humanity. Just as people enter, others exit. And this has been the case since the time of the Prophet ﷺ himself.



Look at how Allah describes the hypocrites in several verses in *Sūrat al-Tawbah*—even regarding their participation in jihād. Some of them stayed behind, while others even went out to deceive! He concludes His description of them with the verse: **“Their spending will not be accepted from them because they disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger and they come not to prayer except reluctantly, and they do not spend except while unwilling.”** (*Sūrat al-Tawbah*: 54)

So, if that is the case, why should a devout Muslim be surprised by the emergence of tens of misguided sects within Islam, since the very time of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions until today?⁽¹⁾

The only difference between us and the previous nations, such as the Jews and Christians, is that their divisions and sectarian splits eventually succeeded in erasing the foundations of their divine messages, concealing and obliterating pure monotheism. As for Islam—the final and enduring religion until the Day of Judgment—this has not happened, nor will it.

Second: If we understand the previous point, we will be certain that there are immutable fundamentals in the religion that no one can ever destroy, no matter what they do. Whoever opposes these fundamentals, in fact, opposes the very essence of Islam. At the forefront of these fundamentals are the Qur’an—the speech of Allah—and the Sunnah and *aḥādīth* that clarify and explain the Qur’an. Every sect that strayed from Islam contains within it a portion of misguidance reflected in the Qur’an and the Sunnah, whether that misguidance is little or great.

Allah has guided us to that which protects from division and fragmentation, for those who desire to be guided. He says: **“This is My path, which is straight, so follow it and do not follow other paths, for they will separate you from His path. This is what He has enjoined upon you, that you may become righteous.”** (*Sūrat al-An‘ām*: 153)

He also says: **“Hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah and do not be divided.”** (*Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*: 103)

Third: As mentioned earlier, merely supplicating or claiming to be a Muslim does not mean one possesses a magical immunity from trials. If that were the case, disbelievers would have pretended to believe just to attain this supposed “cosmic immunity” that grants ease and bliss

(1) This corresponds to the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet ﷺ regarding the division of the Jews into seventy-one sects, the Christians into seventy-two sects, and his own Ummah into seventy-three sects, all of which will be in the Fire except one: those who follow what he and his companions were upon—or, as some versions say, the united group adhering to the undisputed fundamentals of Islam found in the Qur’an and the Sunnah. The *ḥadīth* in its collective chains and wordings from the Companions has been authenticated by a number of scholars: it was declared *ṣaḥīḥ* by al-Ḥākim (1/128), *ḥasan* by Ibn Ḥajar in *Takhrīj al-Kashshāf* (63), authenticated by Ibn Taymiyyah in *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* (3/345), by al-Shāṭibī in *al-I‘tiṣām* (1/430), and by al-‘Irāqī in *Takhrīj al-Iḥyā’* (3/199).



in this world. But the reality is that trials are a foundational part of life, by which faith is tested. And it is through these ongoing tests—generation after generation, century after century—that the steadfastness of the firm believers is revealed, and the traits of the righteous shine through the darkest and most burdensome situations.

By Allah’s wisdom, it was decreed that various trials and tribulations afflict the Muslims, whether from external enemies or internal disagreements, differing opinions, and the emergence of greed in the hearts of the weak in faith and seekers of power. Yet no enemy will ever be able to fully wipe them out, no matter what they try.

Fourth: Regarding civilizational and scientific decline in particular, this stems from many causes—none of which are inherent to Islam or religious commitment. On the contrary, during the golden age of Islamic civilization, the Ummah rose to great heights through its faith, ethics, and adherence to divine commands, building the earth and reflecting upon the universe.

Though no individual is infallible (even during the Prophet’s ﷺ time, there were wrongdoers), the Ummah as a whole remained cohesive—militarily, politically, economically, and socially—until some hypocrites and deviant sects infiltrated the ruling class and government positions. Some betrayed, and some sold out. (And the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad is not far removed from this context.)

Then the Ummah’s weakness increased, with enemies attacking from without and internal traitors from within. This led to a decline in knowledge, alongside military deterioration and centuries of continuous wars, both east and west. Eventually, people forgot the legacy of hundreds of Muslim scholars who laid the very foundations of modern empirical sciences—chemistry, biology, physics, algebra, geometry, astronomy, medicine, pharmacy, and even cryptology and autonomous control sciences⁽¹⁾.

To this day, despite the brilliance of hundreds of Muslim minds outside their home countries in the world’s top universities—when given even a minimum of support—they are rarely acknowledged by politicized media, which instead seeks to embed psychological defeatism in Muslim youth and the general public. When these minds are highlighted, it is usually out of necessity, due to global connectivity and transparency, or merely to save face and maintain an image of progressiveness among citizens. But serious questions remain: who is deliberately hindering scientific research in Muslim countries and their universities? Who is deliberately

(1) To explore many of these discoveries and achievements—with images—of Muslim scientists, you may visit the *1001 Inventions* website.

Arabic version: www.1001inventions.com/arabic

English version: www.1001inventions.com



minimizing its funding compared to the massive investments in media, entertainment, and sports sectors?

In summary, the Sunnah of divine contestation necessitates that there be a continuous struggle between the people of truth and the people of falsehood, and that circumstances never remain static—neither in dominance and subordination nor in strength and weakness. Yet what is amazing is that the Ummah of Islam has never lost the radiant light of truth in its ability to attract sincere seekers, no matter how weakened its worldly state becomes.

Among the factors that increase the influence of such doubts on committed believers are:

- Excessive idealism that assumes people of truth must never fall into disputes or tensions among themselves.
- Excessive idealism in believing that the people of falsehood should never overpower the people of truth⁽¹⁾.
- Ignorance of Islamic legal understanding regarding the nature and wisdom of disagreements.
- Ignorance of the historical greatness of Muslims in all fields of civilization.
- Ignorance of the existence of hundreds of contemporary Muslim role models in science and civilization across the world today.

(1) We may recall here the disobedience of the archers to the command of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ during the Battle of Uḥud, which turned what was a complete victory into a calamity that resulted in the martyrdom of seventy Companions, including the Prophet's ﷺ uncle Ḥamzah (may Allah be pleased with them all), and the injury of the Prophet ﷺ himself in his noble face. All of this occurred due to the violation of a single command of the Prophet ﷺ—so what then should we expect when his Ummah neglects dozens of his commands and engages in what he prohibited? Indeed, struggle and opposition are a divine law between the people of truth and the people of falsehood: **“So when you meet those who disbelieve [in battle], strike [their] necks until, when you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure their bonds, and either [confer] favor afterwards or ransom [them]—until the war lays down its burdens.”** (*Sūrat Muḥammad*: 4)



24. Magnifying One's Sins

This is a strange form of the broader “problem of evil,” where the struggle is internal—psychological vs. psychological, so to speak. The committed Muslim finds himself hating his own soul and even hating the religion because of falling into sin or persisting in it. It starts with disapproval, then an attempt to quit, but when that fails, this individual spirals into despair and frustration, eventually shifting the blame to something else—namely, why Allah did not prevent him from sinning in the first place. Thus, Allah Himself—exalted is He—is blamed!

But in reality, the Prophet ﷺ made it clear that human weakness in the face of sin is a natural part of our design. It does not contradict the fact that Allah created us with free will. The one who has free will is naturally expected to err. As mentioned earlier in the first section of this book, Allah already has angels—beings who never disobey Him. Had He willed to create more of them, He could have created billions. But He willed to create us as we are, with will and choice.

Muslim narrates from Abū Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “By the One in Whose hand is my soul, if you did not sin, Allah would replace you with a people who would sin, then seek forgiveness from Allah, and He would forgive them.”

It was also narrated from Khālid ibn Zayd (may Allah be pleased with him) that he heard the Prophet ﷺ say: “If you did not sin, Allah would create a creation that would sin, then seek His forgiveness, and He would forgive them.”

So then...

The lesson is not whether one falls into sin—we are all vulnerable. No one is protected except those whom Allah protects. What matters is not that a committed Muslim sins, but how he reacts afterward. The true lesson lies in the one who remembers Allah when sinning and leaves it, or regrets afterward and repents.



Allah says: **“And those who, when they commit a shameful deed or wrong themselves, remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins—and who can forgive sins except Allah?—and do not persist knowingly in what they have done.”** (*Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān: 135*)

No matter the sin, Allah is able to forgive it—so long as the person does not associate partners with Him or reject faith. As Allah says: **“Indeed, Allah does not forgive associating partners with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills. And whoever associates others with Allah has certainly fabricated a tremendous sin.”** (*Sūrat al-Nisā’: 48*)

The Prophet ﷺ also explained this practically, as narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: “A servant committed a sin and said: ‘My Lord, I have sinned, so forgive me.’ His Lord said: ‘My servant has recognized that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for them; I have forgiven him.’ Then the servant waited a while, and committed another sin, and said: ‘My Lord, I have sinned again, so forgive me.’ His Lord said: ‘My servant has recognized that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for them; I have forgiven him.’ Then the servant waited a while, committed another sin, and said: ‘My Lord, I have sinned again, so forgive me.’ His Lord said: ‘My servant has recognized that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for them—I have forgiven My servant. Let him do as he pleases.’”

That is, no matter what he does afterward, Allah will forgive him so long as he continues to repent sincerely—resolving not to return to the sin even if his desires or weakness later overcome him—and acknowledges Allah’s power to punish him at any time.

That’s why...

We find a profound truth in the fact that the Prophet ﷺ never removed the love of Allah and His Messenger from the hearts of sinning Muslims. There is no contradiction. Yes, faith increases and decreases, and sins have their consequences, but falling into sin should not cause a person to deny their own belief or love for Allah and His Messenger. How many people are overwhelmed by physical desires, yet still love Allah and His Messenger deeply?

If a committed Muslim reflects on this truth...

By Allah, he would humble himself before all people—even the sinning Muslims—never belittling them, but instead praying for them and for himself to be guided. He would also show mercy to his own soul when he stumbles into sin, and would not plunge into exaggerated blame or despair.

Al-Bukhārī narrates from ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allah be pleased with him): “There was a man during the time of the Prophet ﷺ named ‘Abd Allāh, nicknamed Ḥimār. He used to make the Messenger of Allah ﷺ laugh (meaning he was dear to him), and the Prophet ﷺ had him



punished for drinking alcohol. One day, he was brought in again and ordered to be flogged. A man among the people said, ‘O Allah, curse him! How often he is brought in!’ But the Prophet ﷺ said: ‘Do not curse him! By Allah, I know that he loves Allah and His Messenger.’”

Meaning: I know nothing about him except that he loves Allah and His Messenger.

So, if that was the case with a man who repeatedly drank alcohol, what then of a committed Muslim who occasionally stumbles into minor sins or even greater ones?

Among the factors that worsen this state in some devout individuals are:

- Excessive idealism in imagining oneself immune to sins or relapses.
- Harshness and extremism toward oneself, which can backfire when one does fall.
- Falling into despair and hopelessness about Allah’s mercy—which is, tragically, a form of disbelief.
- Lack of sound religious knowledge and poor understanding of the soul, along with unfamiliarity with works on self-purification and inner reform.



25. Harsh Punishments and Legal Limits (Ḥudūd)

This is one of the modern-day topics exploited by atheists and others to cast doubt in the hearts of committed Muslims about the mercy of Allah, and therefore about Islam itself. Yet it takes no more than a reflection on two wisdoms behind these laws to realize how full of mercy they are, contrary to the accusations made by skeptics and deceivers.

First Wisdom: It is the relief and healing felt by the oppressed or their families.

Anyone who speaks against implementing physical punishment on criminals usually does so from the detached comfort of never having been harmed or seen a loved one harmed. As the saying goes, “The one with his hand in water is not like the one with his hand in fire.” This is a reality ignored by those swayed by emotional slogans and deceptive “humanitarian” rhetoric. Justice in punishment, proportionate to the crime, provides closure to the victim or their loved ones. It also prevents vigilante revenge when the legal penalty is seen as too lenient.

So, anyone who objects to executing a murderer, crucifying someone who terrorizes others with weapons, amputating the hand of a thief, flogging an unmarried adulterer, or stoning a married adulterer to death—such a person should pause and imagine themselves in the shoes of the victim’s spouse, child, or parents. Alternatively, they should consider the perspective of protecting society as a whole. A society where thieves know their hands will be amputated will be far more secure. You can replace stolen property—but not a limb.

What’s even more revealing is that many of those who oppose these rulings under the guise of humanitarianism are merely following the West. If the West employs harsh punishments—such as the electric chair or lethal injection—these critics accept them. However, if the West objects to a particular punishment, they will likely oppose it as well. In reality, there is nothing more sincere than public opinion when it comes to accepting fitting punishment for egregious crimes.



This is seen in the widespread support for the harshest penalties in cases of horrific murders or brutal rapes of young girls⁽¹⁾.

Second Wisdom: Allah, who created the human being, knows best what deters him from wrongdoing.

A single painful punishment witnessed by others can prevent hundreds of future crimes in that society.

By Allah, anyone who lived in a place where the Islamic legal punishments were applied will know that, for centuries, news of the *ḥadd* punishment for theft was rare—just a few cases. The punishment serves as a powerful deterrent; the one who witnesses it warns others, and generations pass down the stories, causing people to restrain themselves.

Allah says: “[As for] the male thief and the female thief—cut off their hands as recompense for what they committed, an exemplary punishment from Allah. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.” (*Sūrat al-Mā'idah: 38*)

Nor should Muslims feel pity when these punishments are carried out or even when witnessing them. In fact, true mercy lies in enforcing the punishment upon the wrongdoer, criminal, or corrupter of society, morals, and people's honor. Otherwise, let one imagine himself in the place of a father whose daughter was violated, or a brother whose sister was defiled: **“The woman and the man guilty of fornication, flog each one of them with a hundred stripes. Let not compassion with them prevent you from carrying out Allah's law, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a group of believers witness their punishment.”** (*Sūrat al-Nūr: 2*)

Or let one imagine himself as the husband whose wife committed adultery and defiled his bed, to realize how merciful the punishment of stoning to death is to his heart when applied to the adulterer or adulteress who is already married.

May Allah protect us all...

It is precisely through these *ḥudūd* (legal punishments), which some find repulsive, that fear of punishment is instilled in weak souls, deterring them and holding them back from *ḥarām* acts. To the extent that, in Saudi Arabia, one could leave his shop open—even if he was selling gold—without fear of theft!

These are not fictional stories, but ones I've heard from Christian (Filipino) individuals, not Muslims—Christians who lived in Saudi Arabia for 30 years. They now complain about the

(1) Such as the recent crime involving the abduction of the Pakistani girl Zainab al-Anṣārī (7 years old) on January 4, 2018, who was subsequently raped and murdered in the city of Kasur, Punjab province.



decreased public implementation of such rulings compared to the past, and they attribute the rising crime rates to this very decline.

Thus, Allah's legal punishments are:

1. Just
2. Deterrent

Of course, not all Islamic *ḥudūd* involve beheading, amputation, or stoning. There is a wide scope for *ta'zīr* (discretionary punishment) for cases in which no fixed ruling is specified, and this is left to the judge's discretion. *Ta'zīr* may take the form of imprisonment, flogging, exile, or even execution.

As for what some Westerners are doing today in the name of “humanity” and “civilization” to soften criminal penalties, it has only backfired—leading to crime rates multiplying many times over! Justice is absent, and punishments are no longer a deterrent. Instead, minor criminals may become seasoned offenders through contact with hardened criminals in prison, not to mention the manipulation of punishments based on influence and connections, so you find severe punishments for small crimes, and trivial sentences for severe ones.

A case in point: in 1951, the United Nations spent millions organizing international conferences on “Criminology and Punishment.” Yet all of it was in vain—just as we've said—because they had turned away from the divine law. Let me leave you with this candid admission of failure by Monsieur Morris Batan, one of the judges in the French Court of Cassation (supposedly the beacon of modern Western legislation and human freedom). In his opening speech at the Crime Prevention Conference held in Paris, 1959, he said: “I am merely a judge in the justice system, and it never occurred to me at any point to concern myself with the foundations of crime prevention. That was never my job. Quite the opposite—my role, past and present, has been focused on punishment, not protection. I have dedicated my long judicial career to relentlessly fighting against the deviants, using the only weapon the law has given me—conventional punishment. I hand out harsh and severe sentences at times to armies of criminals and rebels against society... always striving to match the nature of the punishment to the nature of the crime. And I often ask myself, as many of my colleagues do: Has this weapon we hold now lost its weight and effect? I have felt—and still feel—the pain and bitterness of mythical heroes who, whenever they cut off one head of the monster, found many more growing in its place. The years have passed, and I continue to be amazed that the number of criminals has remained stable—if not increased. And



whenever we send the worst of them to prison, exile, or the guillotine, others immediately rise to take their place in even greater numbers.⁽¹⁾”

As for the factors that cause this issue to influence some observant Muslims:

- Excessive idealism in trying to equate all crimes and all criminals with equal punishments
- Over-sensitivity and exaggerated compassion that stand in the way of necessary physical penalties
- Ignorance of the religious obligation to implement the *ḥudūd*
- Ignorance of the security benefits of having proportionate punishments, even if that includes execution
- Historical ignorance of the effectiveness of public implementation of the *ḥudūd*

(1) It was referenced by Dr. Maṣṣūr Raḥmānī in a paper from the University of Skikda in Algeria, titled “*al-Ijāz al-Tashrīfī fī Mukāfaḥat al-Jarīmah*” (*The Legislative Miracle in Combating Crime*).



Conclusion

These are not all the issues, unfortunately, that may affect the faith of some committed Muslims. Nor have I mentioned every Islamic argument or the views of Western thinkers regarding the problem of evil. Yet with this book, I take a step toward opening the door for those who seek benefit and deeper understanding—particularly in grasping the perfection of Allah’s wisdom in His decrees, which are based on His justice and mercy, even in what may be hidden from us concerning the problem of evil and the trials we dislike. These are matters a Muslim should treat—when unable to fully comprehend them—as among the *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous matters) which must be referred back to the *muḥkamāt* (clear and definitive aspects) of his faith and certainty in Allah, his Creator⁽¹⁾.

So I ask Allah to make this effort beneficial to those who are confused, a means of guidance for those who are astray, and a support for seekers—and that He grant it acceptance.

O Allah, *āmin*.

(1) Just as the Muslim refers any verse of the Qur’an he cannot fully interpret from among the *mutashābihāt* back to the *muḥkamāt* he understands—because of his certainty that all of it is from Allah, as He said: “It is He who has sent down to you, [O Muḥammad], the Book; in it are verses that are clear and definitive—they are the foundation of the Book—and others that are ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they will follow what is ambiguous thereof, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation suitable to them. But no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah. And those firm in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it. All of it is from our Lord.’ But none will take heed except those of understanding.” (*Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*: 7)



Missing Foundations

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**Including an Introductory Overview of the Most Well-Known
Western Responses and a Commentary on Them**

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